

ROUGH STUFF

A FIGHT TO THE DEATH MAY not be the aim of modern contact sports but, like the gladiatorial spectacles of Ancient Rome, they still appeal to a deep-rooted desire for confrontation. And, in spite of strict safety regulations, today's gladiators face an ever-present threat of serious injury – even death.

These are the sports where deliberate physical contact is not only allowed but is encouraged as an important part of the play. They include team sports, such as rugby, American football and ice hockey, and also individual sports such as boxing, wrestling and the martial arts.

It is a well proven scientific principle that an object of larger mass will always dislodge a lighter object. So a large sportsman should always overcome a lighter one.

Size and weight

To minimize the advantage given by size, individual contact sports such as boxing are regulated into weight divisions, so that a flyweight (50 kg) is not in the ring with a heavyweight (over 90 kg), which would be both unfair and very dangerous.

Boxing is the most lethal of all contact sports: in spite of strict safety regulations, more than 100 professional boxers have died during the last 30 years.

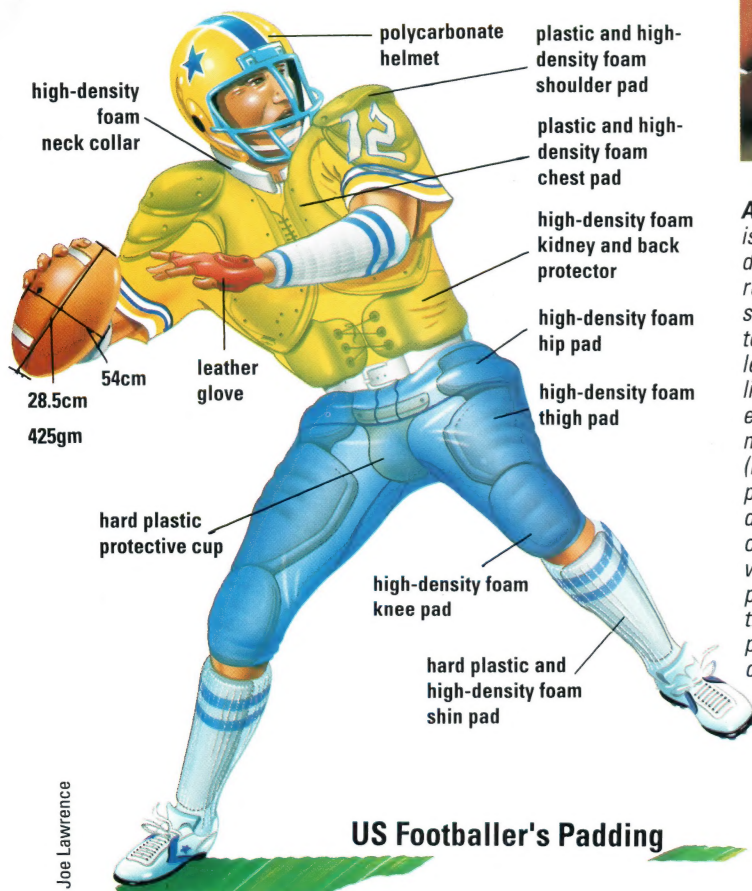


Holly Stein/Allsport

In team sports, size and weight are not always helpful. Ball sports such as rugby also require speed, great agility and stamina. So teams tend to have a blend of large, heavy players and smaller, quicker ones, who fulfil different roles.

The large players either force a way through their opponents' defences, like human battering-rams,

the opponent's body, but these are regulated. A player may not tackle above the neck, or strike or punch deliberately or use the feet, knees or elbows to win possession of the ball. The perfect tackle requires good timing and technique as much as brute strength; it is not unknown for a fly-half to bring down a ram-paging forward nearly twice his



US Footballer's Padding

American football is a much modified descendant of rugby. Although the scoring method – a touchdown (above left) over the goal-line – is similar, extensive body armour is worn (left). This is to prevent injury during tackles and off-ball blocking, where offensive players 'block' their opponents to protect the ball-carrier.

places great emphasis on territorial advantage. The heart of the game is Camp's rule. Devised by Yale University coach, Walter Camp, it states that a team retains possession of the ball only if it can advance it 10 yards in four successive plays, or downs. A match is divided into a series of downs, the ultimate object, as in rugby, is to get the ball over the opposing team's goal line.

Substitutions

However, the major difference between American football and other sports is that each team is allowed to make as many substitutions as it likes during a game – they may even change the whole 11 players. So most teams will have an attacking line-up – the offense – and a defending side – the defense – as well as specialists such as goal kickers. Usually the offense is deployed when the team has possession of the ball at a down and the defense is called on when the opposition have the ball.

Because so much of the game involves bone-crunching collisions, American footballers are heavily protected – deaths were not uncommon 100 years ago. Each player must wear regulation safety equipment, which includes a helmet,

or present their own defensive line, like a wall. In rugby, these players are called forwards, and the lighter, faster – and usually more skilful – players are known as the backs.

Rugby allows direct tackles on

weight with a well-timed tackle. But in 'rucks' and in the scrum, weight is a great advantage.

The division between forwards and backs is even more starkly illustrated in American football, which

shoulder pads, hip pads, thigh pads and knee pads. They may also choose to wear shin pads, a kidney and rib protector, elbow pads, gloves and a gum-shield.

The range of tackles and blocks available to American footballers is



Rugby League is essentially a handling game. Although a drop-goal is kicked over the bar it is worth less than a 'try'. Superficial injuries (above) are a common feature.

ankles, severe bruising and bone fractures. But, as in rugby, it is not unheard of for players to be paralysed by broken spines, or, very rarely, killed.

The most lethal of all contact sports, however, is undoubtedly boxing. The aim of boxing is to land more and better punches than your opponent. However, in doing so,

Colorsport wider than in rugby. The whole body may be used to block or obstruct an opponent, so weight can be very important. A typical play will see the ball passed back to the quarterback by the centre of the offense, while each of the linemen tries to bludgeon his way past his opposite number. The quarterback will usually try to throw the ball to a wide receiver who will probably have two or more tacklers running at him to bring him down as soon as possible.

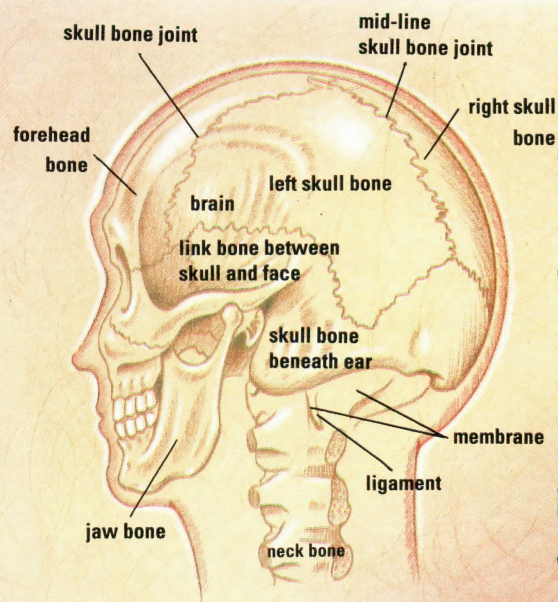
So it is not surprising that there are some serious injuries. The most common are strains of the knees and

Australian Rules Football is a tough game unique to Australia, fought between teams of 18 players over pitches 150 to 200 metres by 120 to 170 metres.



David Cannon/Allsport

THE HIDDEN DANGERS OF HEADING A FOOTBALL



(left), intent on forcing him off line and balance.

Incorrect technique can result in concussion and, rarely, in more serious injury. Whereas the joint between the two halves of the skull – the mid-line skull bone joint (above) – normally knits into a strong spherical shape, it can join imperfectly, leaving a small, and relatively weaker, ridge. In such cases, incorrectly heading a football can move the skull bones fractionally, causing headaches or double vision.

A further problem is the accumulative wear of heading on the muscles of the neck. If over-strained, the small ligaments and membranes in the neck can tear and this may lead to an increasing likelihood of painful arthritis of the neck some 15 or so years later.

Joe Lawrence

fighters can run grave risks – the more so because a fighter's injuries may only be apparent after the fight. In addition, deciding that a fighter is unfit to continue boxing is left to the discretion of the referee who, being human, may make a mistake and not stop the fight before serious injury has been done to a boxer.

The art of boxing is to defend yourself against the worst blows, while trying to get in punches of your own. But even the best boxers take enormous punishment, because heavy blows are landing on sensitive

Sumo wrestling is the heavily ritualized Japanese national sport. Great reliance is placed on weight, with some champions scaling over 130 kg. The aim is to force an opponent to the ground or out of the 3.6-metre circle.



PROFILE

BOXING DIVISIONS

Weight categories	Amateur (IABA*)	Professional (WBC*)
Straw–	—	47.6 kg
Light fly–	48 kg	49 kg
Fly–	51 kg	51 kg
Bantam–	54 kg	53.5 kg
Super bantam–	—	55 kg
Feather–	57 kg	57 kg
Junior light–	—	59 kg
Light–	60 kg	61 kg
Light (junior) welter–	63.5 kg	63.5 kg
Welter–	67 kg	66.5 kg
Light middle–	71 kg	70 kg
Middle–	75 kg	72.5 kg
Light heavy–	81 kg	79 kg
Cruiser–	—	88.45 kg
Heavy–	91 kg	88.45+ kg
Super-heavy–	91+ kg	

*IABA: International Amateur Boxing Association
*WBC: World Boxing Council

and slurred speech of many ex-boxers. It will usually involve memory lapses, blackouts and even premature senility, yet may only show up years after a boxer has retired from the ring.

The problem has led one boxing magazine to argue for a return to bare-knuckle fighting. This was the

areas of their bodies throughout the bout. Muhammad Ali, for instance, has calculated that he took 1.5 million blows in his 25 years in the ring.

The worst types of injury, however, are to the head. Brain injuries caused by punches can be of three kinds:

- straightforward concussion, which results from a shock wave through the brain and renders the victim unconscious.

Thai boxing is a fast-moving martial art that grew out of the ancient Siamese military training syllabus. In its modern form, contestants are matched as much by experience as weight. Boxers wear 220 gm gloves and can punch the body or the head. Kicks with the shin and knee are allowed to the legs and body but not to the head. Bouts are over three 2-minute rounds or five 3-minute rounds.



- a torn blood vessel, which quickly leads to unconsciousness
- slow bleeding in the brain with a delayed onset of unconsciousness.

Other major problems that boxers can suffer are having the retina of the eye detached by frequent blows to the head, and damage to the soft tissues of the brain.

Bare-knuckle fighting

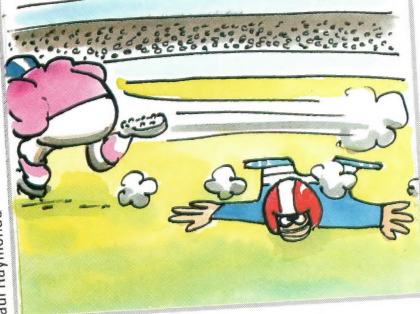
This last injury is thought to be one of the main causes of boxers becoming 'punch drunk' – the condition that is shown by the dulled reflexes

norm over a hundred-years ago, before the introduction of rules laid down in England by the Marquess of Queensberry, which among other things, required boxers to wear gloves. Today's argument is that as gloves protect the hands, much heavier punches can be landed. Therefore, if boxers fought without gloves, they would not be able to cause so much brain damage, although the number of facial cuts would increase. Cuts, it is argued, will heal, whereas brain damage is irreversible.

Just amazing!

SHORT CAREER

IN 1970 PAT PALINKAS BECAME THE FIRST LADY AMERICAN FOOTBALLER WHEN SHE HELD THE BALL FOR HER PLACE-KICKER HUSBAND. SHE RETIRED IMMEDIATELY AFTER A LINEBACKER FLATTENED HER!



SUPER CYCLING



COMPETITIVE CYCLING IS ONE of the fastest-growing sports of the 1990s. To succeed at the highest level, the cyclist must be in peak condition. He or she also needs a precision-crafted machine that may cost almost as much as a small car.

A specialized road-racing bike may look like a standard sports bike, but there are several differences. First, there is the frame. It has to be strong and light, but also flexible enough to cope with the twists and turns of racing. The most popular material is chrome-molybdenum alloy steel, between 0.7 and 1.0 mm thick. Weight is saved by a process called

butting, which means the tubes are thinned out internally where the least strength is needed.

The really expensive machines have frames made of lightweight aluminium or titanium-alloy. The best frames are hand-made and weigh no more than about 2.5 kg. Expensive

The Tour de France is the longest-lasting sporting event on land in the world, taking 21 days to complete. The 4,000 km course over both flat and mountainous terrain demands speed and stamina. In tandem sprinting (right), riders race over a distance of about 1500 metres.



titanium-alloys are also used for the accessories. The handlebars are usually made of duralumin alloy, about 1mm thick. This is an aluminium-based metal that is as strong and as hard as steel.

Tubulars

A racing bike's tyres, known as tubulars, have a carcass of fine cotton or silk sown around a very light inner tube. The outer surface is covered with a light tread, and the whole tyre is stuck on to the wheel rims with cement or special rim tape. All tyres perform best after they have been 'matured' for a year or more in a cool, dark room, lightly inflated on wheel rims. This hardens the tread.

Track bikes, used on single-lap tracks, have smaller and stronger frames to cope with the sideways stresses of speed cycling. They weigh between 6 and 8 kg, whereas a road-racer is typically 8.5 to 10.5 kg. Even lighter is the Lotus superbike, on which Chris Boardman won a gold medal for Britain at the 1992 Olympics. It has a one-piece carbon fibre frame.

Some track bikes are fitted with solid carbon-disc wheels to reduce wind resistance. The tyres are sometimes filled with helium to lessen weight. Track machines have no brakes or gears and the back wheel cannot freewheel. Riders slow down by exerting backward pressure on the pedals or placing a gloved hand over the front wheel.



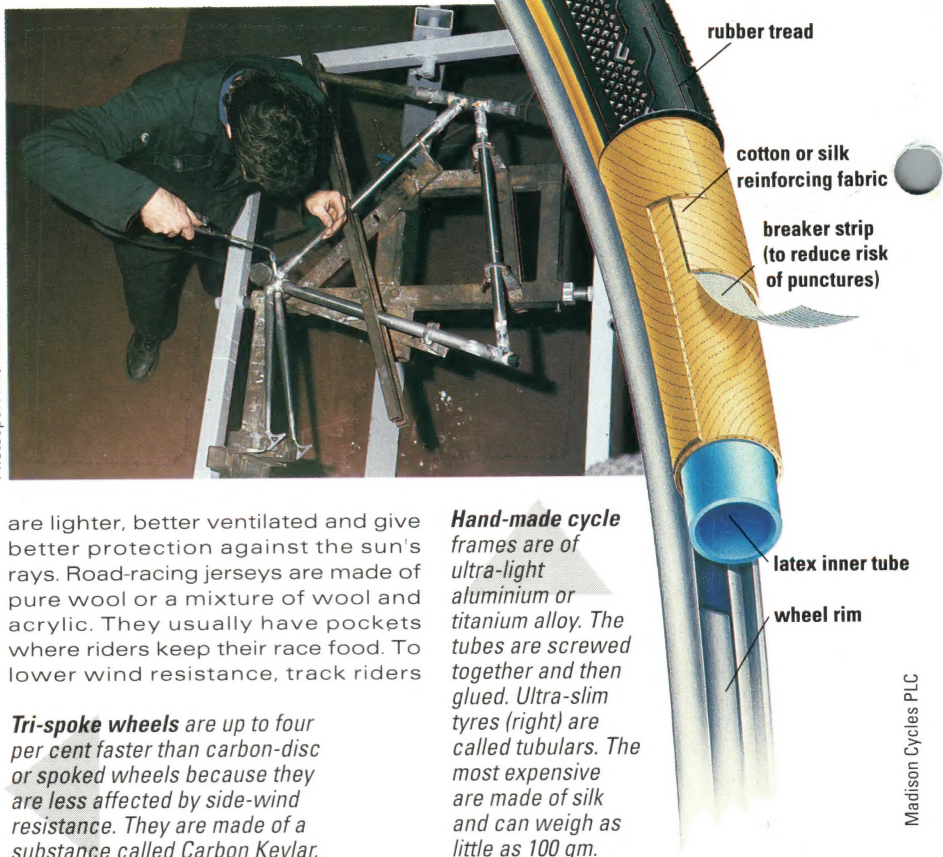
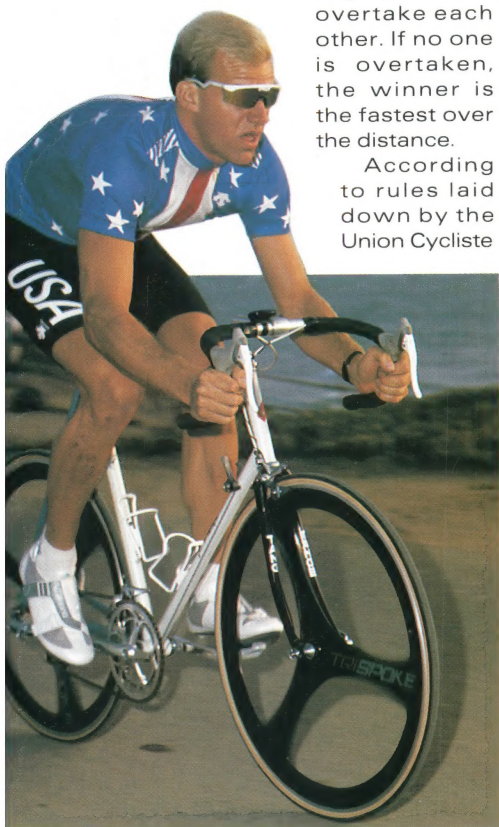
Gamma/Frank Spooner Pictures

Mike Powell/Allsport

Track events take place on a velodrome, which should have banked corners and be no more than 500 metres long. Track-racing consists of time-trials, sprints and team or individual pursuits. In pursuit racing, riders or teams start at opposite sides of the track, and the object is to overtake each other. If no one is overtaken, the winner is the fastest over the distance.

According to rules laid down by the Union Cycliste

Photosport International



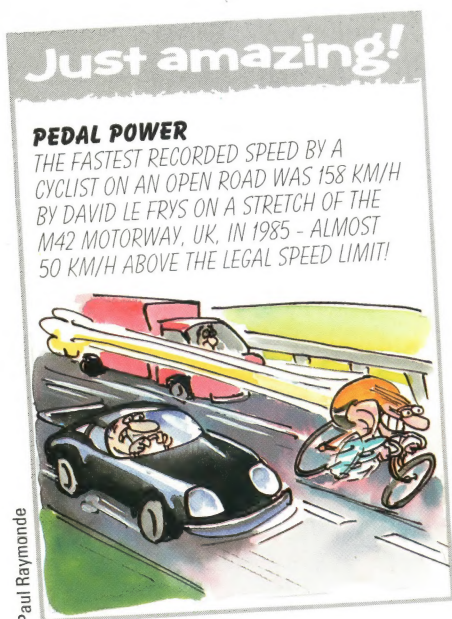
Madison Cycles PLC

are lighter, better ventilated and give better protection against the sun's rays. Road-racing jerseys are made of pure wool or a mixture of wool and acrylic. They usually have pockets where riders keep their race food. To lower wind resistance, track riders

Tri-spoke wheels are up to four per cent faster than carbon-disc or spoked wheels because they are less affected by side-wind resistance. They are made of a substance called Carbon Kevlar.

Hand-made cycle frames are of ultra-light aluminium or titanium alloy. The tubes are screwed together and then glued. Ultra-slim tyres (right) are called tubulars. The most expensive are made of silk and can weigh as little as 100 gm.

Internationale (UCI), cycling's world governing body, all road-racing riders must wear cycling shoes, white ankle socks, short black racing shorts, a racing jersey and a crash hat or helmet. Crash-hats are made out of padded leather bars and are held in position by a chin strap. Plastic helmets that cover the whole head

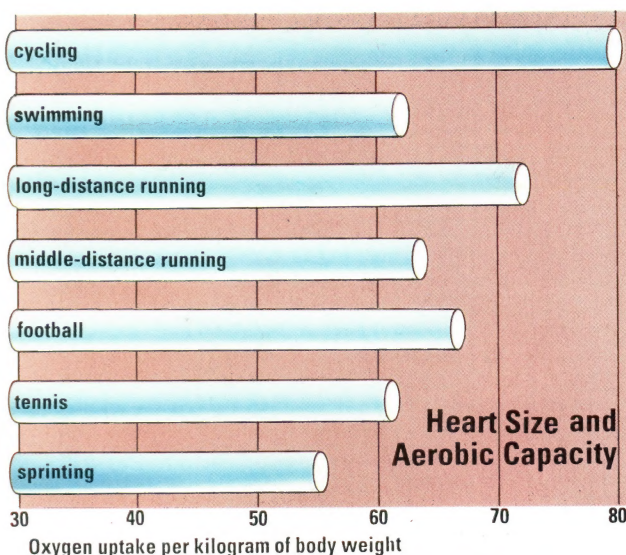


Paul Raymond

Heart of an untrained person (600-700 cu cm)

Heart of a trained cyclist (1000-1400 cu cm)

Mark Franklin



Cycling is the best sport for achieving aerobic fitness. A racing cyclist's heart muscle increases in size during training – and may grow to twice that of an unfit person's heart.

taking part in time trials and circuit races wear silk jerseys or aerodynamic one-piece suits.

Feet first

The racing shoe is probably the most important item of equipment for the competitive cyclist. The uppers are made of soft box-calf leather and have holes to allow the feet to breathe. Most shoes have a leather sole with a steel, aluminium or plastic plate insert. This prevents the shoe from sliding around on the pedal.

THE BIG WHEEL

Italian cyclist Francesco Moser pioneered the use of carbon-disc wheels when he broke the world one-hour cycling record in 1984. These have now become the standard in record attempts and track-racing. But Moser has now gone one step ahead of the rest – he is using a bike with a rear wheel one metre in diameter. This allows him to use a more efficient gear ratio than normal. It also increases the gyroscopic effect (momentum) of the wheel, providing greater stability and a much smoother running bike.

Even with a slightly larger front wheel than usual, the combined weight is still less than the wheels used in his 1984 record.

ON TARGET

TARGET SHOOTING IS ONE of the oldest and most popular participatory sports in the world. From archery to air-rifle shooting, the aim is the same – to direct a projectile at a target with maximum accuracy and consistency.

Good marksmanship relies on simple basic principles – accurate aiming from a steady base, calmness and concentration. Successful archery depends on the archer's body and stance controlling the angle and direction of fire. The arrow is delivered by releasing the drawn string of a bow. Although it has been estimated that 90 per cent of archery is due to the archer's skill and only 10 per cent is due to the equipment, there are strict guidelines for the archer's tools.

Strong bows

The bow can be simple or complicated. It must have the same basic design of a grip, two flexible limbs and a single bowstring. The bow can be a curved longbow, a recurve bow that has a double curve at each end

Alisport



Archery's basic principles have hardly changed over the centuries, but the bows and arrows are now made of plastics and Kevlar; targets may soon be made of foam instead of straw.

Russell Cheyne/Alisport

or a compound bow, using cams and pulleys to give greater force (see NEW TECHNOLOGY, page 43).

The string is usually made of Dacron or Kevlar. Dacron fibre, with up to 12 strands twisted together is long-lasting but tends to stretch slightly. Kevlar is the strong yet lightweight material used in armoured cars and bullet-proof vests.

Kevlar strings do not stretch, but they have a limited life of between

1,000 and 2,000 arrows – a typical day's shooting will be around 150 arrows. Each string needs to be 'shot in' for about 100 arrows, so a Kevlar string will not last much more than a month.

Arrows used to be wooden, but now most are made of tough aluminium alloy, which means they can be straightened if they become bent. The length depends on the size and experience of the archer. Top

Just amazing!

LONG-RUNNING ARCHERS

THE OLDEST ARCHERY CONTEST IN THE WORLD IS THE PA-PINGO SHOOT BY THE KILWINNING ARCHERS IN SCOTLAND, WHICH HAS BEEN RUNNING SINCE 1488.



Paul Raymonde



that he can shoot with the bow in the same position every time. The essence of good archery is to find the target, and then to keep hitting it by maintaining a consistent draw weight and trajectory time after time.

Shooting

The same principles of accuracy and consistency apply to the shooting of firearms, except that the propellant force of the bullet or pellet will automatically be the same for every shot.

The only occasion lenses or telescopic sights are allowed in shooting is in running game target, an Olympic event that involves shooting at a moving target with ten concentric scoring rings. The target is carried across a 10-metre-wide opening on a trolley designed to give the impression of a running animal. The competitor must hold the rifle in a standing position. He is allowed 30

Wheelchair archers thrive in a sport in which they can compete on equal terms against able-bodied sportsmen and sportswomen.

petitors, who use double-barrelled shotguns loaded with lead-shot cartridges. In this sport, the careful aim of the archer or fixed target shooter is not as important as a trained eye and fast reactions.

Smallbore rifle shooting involves three positions – standing, kneeling and prone. Steady nerves are need-



Smallbore rifle shooting (requires an accurate aim to hit the target (actual size, left). Each rifle butt is tailored to suit the marksman; the glove reduces hand tremors.

archers use carbon arrows, which do not bend. The flights – or 'fletchings' – are usually made of plastic rather than natural feathers.

Loosing arrows

As well as the basic equipment, many archers use stabilizers fitted in front of the bow. They make the bow heavier and lower its centre of gravity, which helps reduce the movement in the hand when the string is 'loosed', or released.

A simple sight is permitted on the bow as long as it has no lens or prism. It may be no more than a ring with a pin in the centre. The archer aligns it with a point on the target, so

shots with the target moving slowly and 30 shots with it moving quickly. This means that as well as calculating the distance, trajectory and velocity of the bullet, he must also allow for sideways movement.

Clay-pigeon shooting

Another Olympic event in which the targets are not fixed is clay-pigeon shooting, derived from live pigeon shooting, which was outlawed in Britain in the 19th Century.

Measuring 110 mm in diameter, clays are launched by mechanical traps in wide arcs above the com-

ed to stop the rush of adrenalin that can ruin a marksman's aim in a big competition, so mental relaxation is vital. Keeping as still as possible is essential and the top marksmen have enormous mental and physical control. Concentration must be total to control muscles and maintain a good hold, thus aiming accurately.

Breathing exercises

Many marksmen use special breathing exercises to help them remain virtually motionless while they aim and shoot. Their breathing becomes shallower as the target is lined up, and may stop for up to 8 seconds as they pull the trigger – anything longer would starve the brain of oxygen and cause loss of concentration.

THE MASTER EYE

Most people have one dominant eye that is unconsciously used more when looking at an object. It is this eye that is preferred when looking through a camera or lining up a target. Archers or shooters use this simple test to find out which is their master eye. Hold both index fingers in front of you, 10 cm apart. Keep both eyes open and line up the fingers. Now close the left eye and see if the fingers are still aligned – if they are, then the right eye is dominant. If not, close the right eye and keep the left eye open – if your fingers line up, it means the left eye is dominant. If the fingers don't line up with either eye, but only with both eyes open, then neither eye is the master eye and you may use whichever one you wish.



Clay 'pigeons' are launched into the air by spring-loaded traps. Olympic events use electrically operated traps, but the manual type (shown here) is more common in everyday shooting.

Q CONDUCTORS

Q CORROSION

Q METAL ORES

METALS

METALS ARE INCREDIBLY useful materials. People have been using metals for 8,000 years and yet, even in this age of plastics, they remain an important part of our lives. Metals are resistant to heat, and they conduct electricity – a feat no plastic can achieve.

Claus Meyer/Colorific!



In the hostile environment of a steel works, iron is combined with carbon to make the harder alloy steel.

Metals generally have a shiny appearance, or metallic lustre, and they can usually be fashioned into thin sheets by hammering – a property known as malleability. Some metals are described as being ductile, which means that they can be drawn out into thin wires.

As well as conducting electricity, metals are good conductors of heat. They all behave chemically in a similar way, too. When metals react with oxygen they form substances known as bases, or alkalis. A base is a chemical that reacts with an acid to form a salt, which is a combination of a metal and one or more non-metals;

examples include common salt, or sodium chloride, lead sulphate and potassium nitrate.

Semi-metals

Of the 92 naturally occurring elements, 69 are classed as metals, but there are also five semi-metals – elements that sometimes behave like metals and sometimes like non-metals. These are boron, germanium, arsenic, selenium and tellurium.

The properties of metals differ from one to another and this makes them useful for different purposes. For example, the best conductors of heat and electricity are silver and copper,

Metals have many uses. These huge rolls of sheet aluminium will be made into parts for cars, ships and planes – and into foil to wrap the Christmas turkey.

but, as silver is less widely available, it is copper that is generally used in electricity cables and heating systems. Iron is very common and also very easy to work. This and the fact that it can be turned into the much harder form known as steel, makes it the world's most commonly used metal. Most metals are solid at normal temperatures, but mercury is a liquid. It expands noticeably when

Tony Stone Photo Library



Tony Stone Photo Library

Gold bars are made by heating gold in a furnace until it melts at 1064°C . The molten metal is poured into moulds where it cools and solidifies.

heated and is therefore mainly used in thermometers.

Some metals react with other chemicals very easily. Sodium and potassium, for example, react by fizzing violently on contact with water and are never found in the pure state in nature. Other metals react more slowly; iron, for example, forms iron oxide (rust) when exposed to air and water, and copper eventually becomes covered in a green film – a type of copper carbonate.

Gold and silver

Among the metals that are least susceptible to corrosion in air are lead and aluminium. Lead is a rather soft, dense metal and, in its pure form, is limited to such things as roofing and car battery plates. Aluminium, on the other hand, is a much harder metal that is very easy to work. It therefore

has a very wide range of uses including car bodies, aircraft frames, long-distance power transmission lines, window frames, saucepans and kitchen foil. The least reactive metals are silver and gold, which, being rare, are used to make jewellery.

Mineral ores

Some metals occur in the pure, or native, state in nature. Most gold, for example, is obtained in this form, and in a few places native silver and copper can be found. All other metals are obtained in the form of mineral ores. These have to be dug up and then treated to obtain the pure metals.

A metal ore is generally extracted from the ground by mining, either on the surface or deep underground. The details of the process in which a metal is then extracted from the material that is mined varies from metal

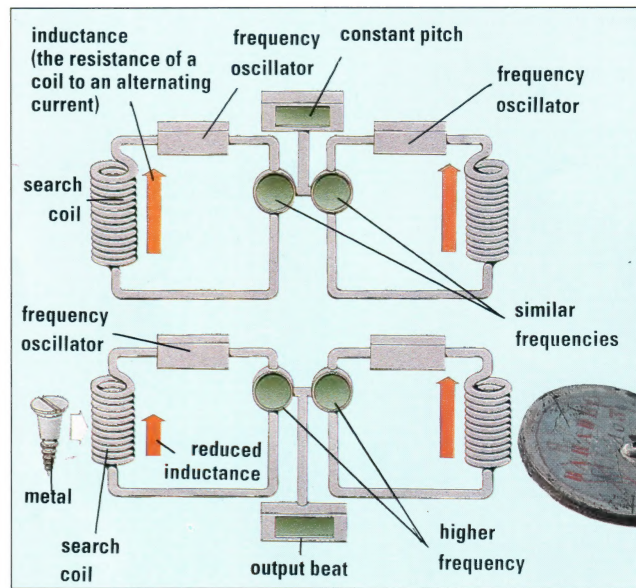
MIXING METALS

An alloy is formed when metals are melted together. One familiar alloy is stainless steel, which is steel mixed with chromium and nickel. The chromium at the surface reacts with oxygen in the air to form a thin layer that prevents corrosion. Adding manganese to steel makes it tougher, and molybdenum and tungsten help steel tools stay sharp.

Copper and zinc form brass, which is more resistant to corrosion. Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin; it melts at a lower temperature and is easier to cast. Pewter is an alloy of lead with antimony and copper, and dentist's amalgam for fillings is composed of mercury and copper. Sterling silver contains 7.5 per cent copper while 18-carat gold contains 25 per cent silver and copper.

A metal detector works by

comparing the frequencies in two circuits (left). When one coil comes near metal, the listener hears a series of pulses



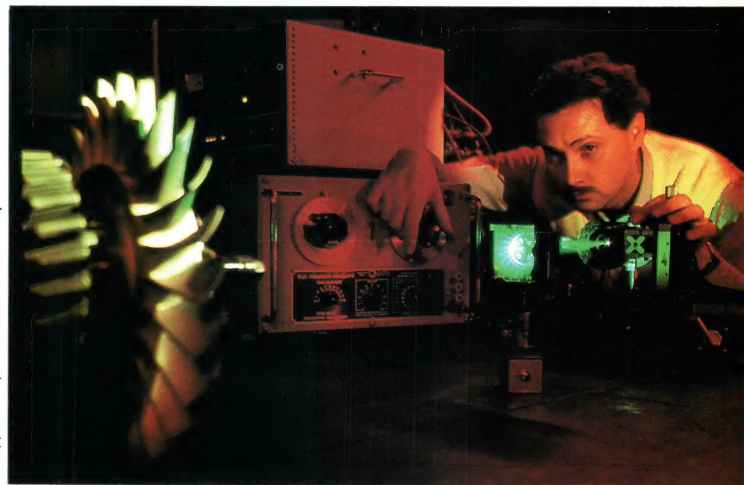
Coty/Jerrican



Holograms are used to test metal helicopter rotors.

Once the hologram has been made the real rotor can be subjected to severe vibrations, then it can be compared with the hologram in laser light so that minute distortions can be detected.

Philippe Plailly/Science Photo Library



Just amazing!

STEEL BAND

700 MILLION TONNES OF STEEL IS PRODUCED WORLDWIDE EACH YEAR -- ENOUGH TO MAKE A 1-MM-THICK WIRE THAT WOULD WRAP ROUND THE WORLD OVER 28 MILLION TIMES.



Paul Raymonde

to metal. Usually, the ore is first separated from the gangue – unwanted earth and rock. Some metal ores, such as those of iron, lead, tin and copper are then smelted (heated to a high temperature in a furnace with other chemicals) to release the metal. Aluminium, on the other hand, is extracted by a chemical process to produce a chemical known as alumi-

na, which is then electrolysed – that is, electricity is passed through it – to produce pure aluminium.

Some metals are more dense than others, which means that the matter they contain is concentrated into a smaller space. For example, lead is very dense, which is why a small piece is so much heavier than a similarly sized piece of aluminium.

MATERIALS

ATOMIC NUMBERS

THE BIG BANG

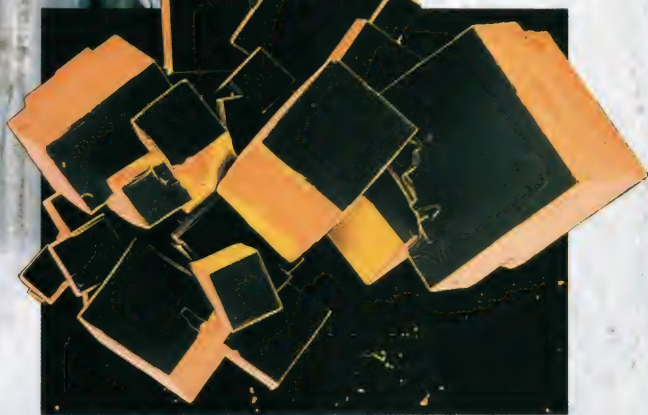
RADIO ISOTOPES

EVERYTHING AROUND US, every material or substance that we can see or feel, is made of what scientists call matter. And all matter is made up of tiny particles called atoms. There are a number of different kinds of atoms. However, when all the atoms in a substance are exactly the same, the substance is known as an element.

Scientists know of over 100 different elements. Of these 92 occur naturally in the world about us. Examples include hydrogen, helium, oxygen, carbon, iron, silver and lead. Each element is known by a name given to it when it was first discovered. Each element is also distinguished by a number, called its *atomic number* – defined by the number of protons in the atom. Hydrogen is thus 1, helium 2 and so on.

Artificial elements

All the known elements can be arranged in a table, known as the Periodic Table (see Dataquest, Issue 39), in which the horizontal rows show the elements in the order of increasing atomic number. The vertical



Pure salt – sodium chloride – is one of the most common elements. In the absence of impurities, the crystals (inset left) form an exact cube



Tony Stone Photo Library, London

A scientist prepares a sample of radioactive iodide-125 – an isotope – for use as a medical tracer.



Philippe Plailly/Science Photo Library

columns, known as periods, contain elements that have similar chemical characteristics.

Elements with atomic numbers of over 92 do not occur in nature, but they can be made artificially. The elements neptunium (atomic number 93) and plutonium (94), for example, are formed when uranium is bombarded with slow-moving neutrons in a nuclear reactor. Americium (95) can be made by

occur naturally were also created. But they were created by the events that formed the universe. The simplest and smallest atoms were created first, during the huge explosion known as the Big Bang. One tenth of a second after the Big Bang took place the first protons had been formed. Four minutes later these protons had interacted to form the lightest elements, hydrogen, helium, and lithium. The hydrogen

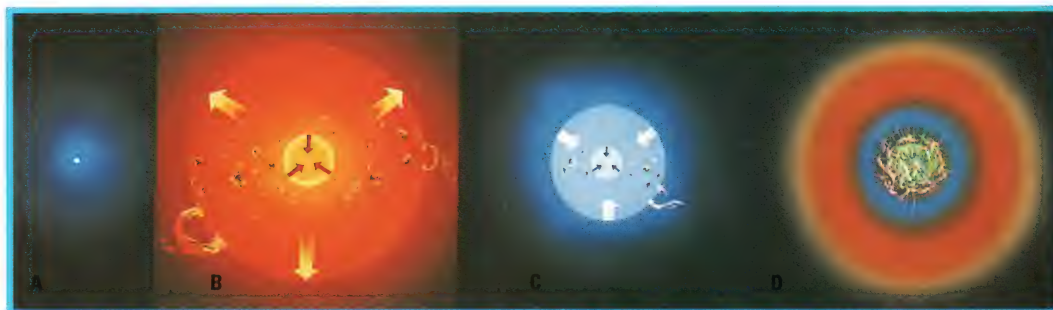
the same element from each other they are normally known by their mass numbers, that is the total number of protons and neutrons in each atom. Thus normal hydrogen is hydrogen-1, deuterium is hydrogen-2 and tritium is hydrogen-3. In practice most elements exist as two or more isotopes, and so their atomic weights are seldom nice round figures. Iron, for example, has four main isotopes, iron-54, iron-56, iron-57 and iron-58. The normal atomic weight of iron is 55.84, which

ROCK WEAR

Asbestos is the name given to the fibrous forms of several kinds of rock. Strictly, asbestos is the fibrous form of actinolite. Most commercial asbestos, however, comes from another mineral – chrysolite. Its fibres are short but fine and strong; 1 kg of chrysolite can produce 88,700 metres of asbestos thread.

Being made of rock, asbestos does not burn, and its melting point is very high. And because it is fibrous, it is easy to weave into fabrics and compress into flat panels in order to create fire-resistant materials. Unfortunately, if people breathe in the tiny fibres they can develop a disease known as asbestosis. The sharp fibres irritate and damage the delicate lining of the lung, and may also pierce the lung and damage the outer lining. Sufferers often develop lung cancer.

Supernovae, the violent explosions of stars, are responsible for distributing all the natural elements. A blue star (A), powered by hydrogen fusion, expands to form a red giant (B), which collapses (C), then rebounds (D) – blowing the star apart.



Sally Bensussen/Science Photo Library

bombarding plutonium with neutrons, and curium (96) is made by bombarding plutonium with the nuclei of helium atoms. This has to be done at very high speed and an accelerator is used to get the helium nuclei moving fast enough.

Super-heavy elements

Scientists have made elements with atomic numbers of up to 108 and in 1987 a group of Russian scientists claimed to have made one with an atomic weight of 110. These elements exist for only a few milliseconds, before they rapidly decay into elements with lower atomic numbers. However, some scientists suggest that if so-called super-heavy elements, with atomic numbers of over 114, could be made, they might perhaps be more stable.

Of course, all of the elements that

and helium then began to form stars, inside which heavier elements began to form. Helium nuclei fused to form beryllium, and beryllium nuclei fused with helium nuclei to form carbon – the element that is a vital part of every living thing on Earth. Next carbon and helium nuclei fused to form oxygen, and so on until all the elements that we know were formed. Some of the early stars blew themselves apart in explosion: known as supernovae, scattering the newly-formed elements far and wide. Over many millions of years the elements were spread throughout the universe.

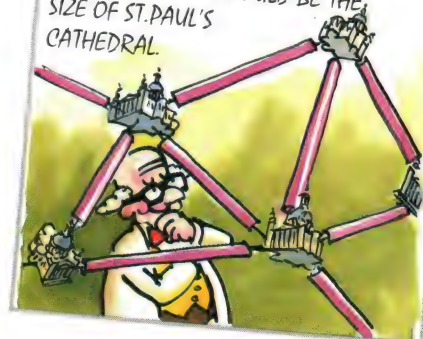
Mass numbers

Different forms of the same element – that is, atoms with the same number of protons, but different numbers of neutrons – are known as isotopes. To distinguish isotopes of

Just amazing!

A NUCLEAR MARBLE

THE ELECTRON/NEUTRON-CONTAINING, NUCLEUS OF AN ATOM IS THE SMALLEST PART. IF IT WAS AS BIG AS A MARBLE, THE WHOLE ATOM WOULD BE THE SIZE OF ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL.



Paul Raymond

reflects the relative abundance of these isotopes.

In most cases isotopes are unimportant to us. A few, however, are useful. Deuterium, for example, is used in the form of deuterium oxide, or heavy water. Heavy water (see PLANET EARTH page 69) has the property of being able to slow down moving neutrons more easily than normal water. It is therefore used in some nuclear generating plants as a combined reactor coolant and moderator (neutron slower).

Among the most useful isotopes are those that are radioactive. These are unstable isotopes that naturally

Petroleum is a naturally occurring mixture of hydrocarbons, often found with traces of sulphur and vanadium.

Although widespread in the Earth's crust, oil companies have increasingly had to search and drill – from rigs such as the Claymore-A in the North Sea – beneath the sea.

Radiation from the nuclear accident at Chernobyl, Ukraine in 1986 sent farmers out with Geiger counters to check their crops.

Richard Folwell/Science Photo Library



Gamma/Frank Spooner Pictures

break down, or decay, into other elements. They do this by giving out radiation in the form of sub-atomic particles – either an alpha particle (two protons and two neutrons) or a beta particle (an electron moving at high speed). Sometimes gamma rays are given out as well. Alpha particles, beta particles and gamma rays can be detected using special equipment, such as a Geiger counter. So radioactive isotopes, or radioisotopes, make excellent tracer

The modern car consists of a vast 'stew' of chemical elements. The most commonly occurring is carbon – found in just over a fifth of the materials.

materials. If a radioisotope is fed into a mechanical, chemical or biological system, its path through the system is easy to follow.

Radioisotopes are now widely used in medicine, in industry and in scientific research. For example, iodine-131 can be injected into a patient's body to test how well the thyroid gland is working. Iodine normally accumulates in the thyroid gland and by detecting how much radioactive iodine accumulates, doctors can find out if the gland is underactive, overactive or working normally. Other isotopes used in medicine include strontium-85, technetium-99 and indium-111.

Paul Williams

Ceramics

- 15 engine components - ceramics (Al₂O₃)
- 16 disc brakes - asbestos (MgO, SiO₂)

Metals

- 9 body panels - steel (Fe, C)
- 10 fuel tank - steel (Fe, C)
- 11 bumper - chrome-plated steel (Fe, Cu)
- 14 coil suspension - steel vanadium alloy (Fe, C, V)
- 15 engine components - aluminium (Al)
- beryllium (Be)
- lead (Pb)
- molybdenum (Mo)
- nickel (Ni)
- steel (Fe, C, W)
- tellurium (Te)
- zinc (Zn)

Glass

- 17 windows - glass (SiO₂)
- 18 headlamps - glass (SiO₂)

Rubber

- 19 tyres - vulcanized rubber (C, H, S)

Minerals

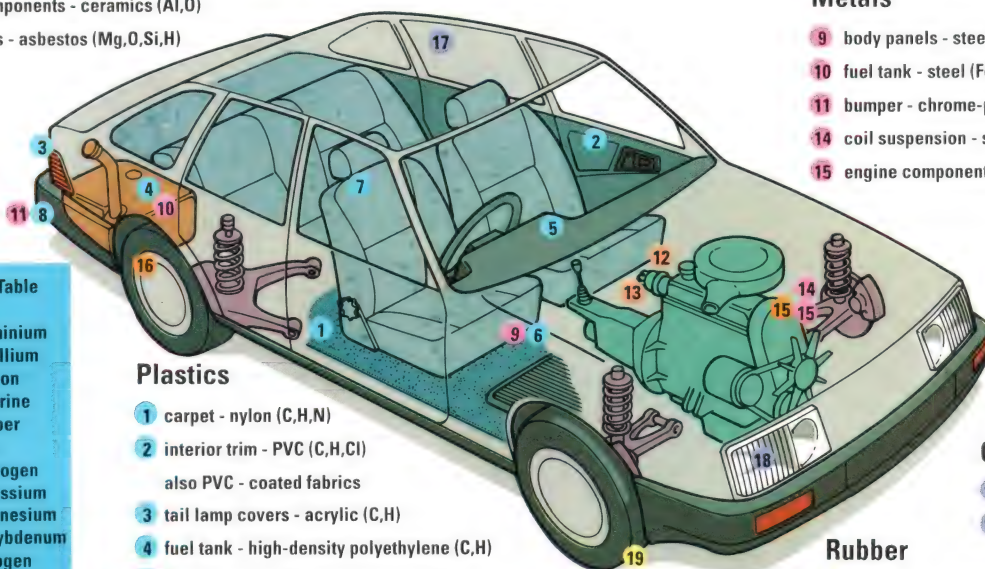
- 12 distributor head - mica (Mg, Al, Si, K, O, H)
- 13 distributor - talc (Mg, Si, O, H)

Plastics

- 1 carpet - nylon (C, H, N)
- 2 interior trim - PVC (C, H, Cl)
- also PVC - coated fabrics
- 3 tail lamp covers - acrylic (C, H)
- 4 fuel tank - high-density polyethylene (C, H)
- 5 fascia panel - ABS polypropylene (C, H)
- 6 body panels - glass reinforced plastic (C, H, Si, O)
- 7 seats - polyurethane (C, H) + other plastics
- 8 bumper - ABS (C, H, N) polycarbonate (C, H, O)
- polypropylene (C, H)

Elements Table

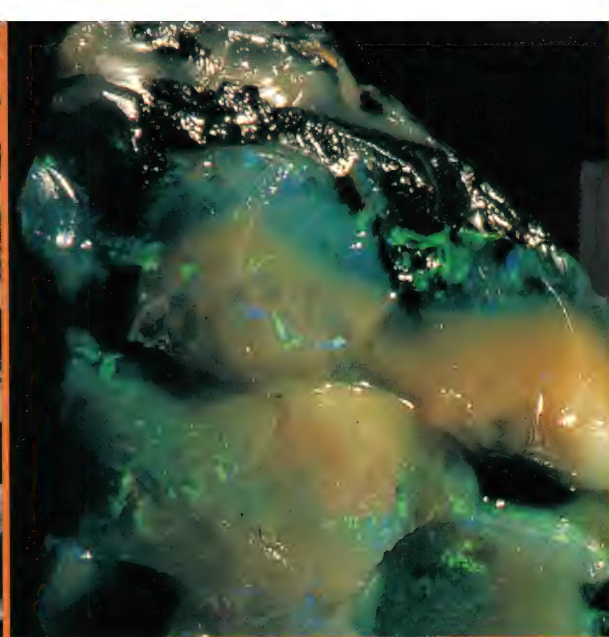
Al	aluminium
Be	beryllium
C	carbon
Cl	chlorine
Cu	copper
Fe	iron
H	hydrogen
K	potassium
Mg	magnesium
Mo	molybdenum
N	nitrogen
Ni	nickel
O	oxygen
Pb	lead
Si	sodium
S	sulphur
Te	tellurium
V	vanadium
W	tungsten
Zn	zinc





Fire opal is one of the transparent, orangey-yellow varieties of opal – a type of silica crystal. Highly prized as a semi-precious gemstone, it is used extensively in jewellery.

A botryoidal (grape-like) mass of haematite – a red or black mineral consisting of iron oxide. It is the most common iron ore but is only weakly magnetic.



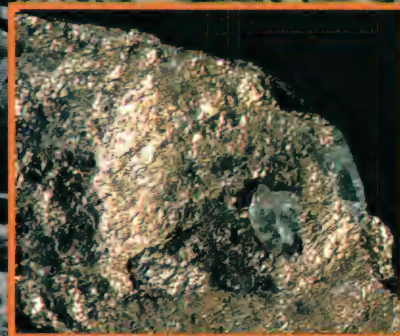
Talc is a soft, greasy mineral containing magnesium silicate. Apart from the popular talcum powder it is used in ceramics, paints, plastics and paper.

Yellow crystals of monoclinic sulphur – used in matches, gunpowder and sulphuric acid.



Lead sulphide or galena is the most common ore of lead. The mineral is found in clumps of hexahedral (six-sided) crystals.

Quartz is a widespread mineral that is a major component of sands and sandstones.



Copper pyrites is an abundant copper ore. One of the first metals to have been used by humans, it is also one of the strongest pure metals.

 BOMB AIMING

 RANGE FINDING

 SILENT WEAPON

BEAMS IN BATTLE



Huge lasers were built as part of the **Star Wars** programme. The aim was to launch them into space on satellites, where they were supposed to destroy incoming ballistic missiles.

LASER BEAMS HAVE ALWAYS conjured up the science fiction image of the death ray. But it is only very recently that they have had any real military application.

Modern armies now use lasers as target designators – usually known as laser target markers. When forward air controllers called in aircraft to provide close support to troops on the battlefield they often used to risk bombing their own men. A pilot flying perhaps as low as 100 ft at 400 knots, who is being shot at, could easily make fatal mistakes.

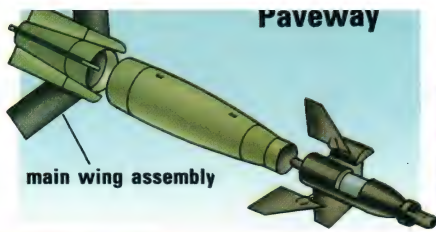
The task of the forward air controller – the man who calls in air support – is made much easier by a laser target marker. Now all he has to

do is get himself into a position on the ground where there is a direct line of sight between him and the target. He shines the laser beam directly on to the target. When the air support comes in, the pilot drops his bombs into the envelope of energy reflected from the target. Sensors in the nose of the bomb detect the source of the energy and home in on the target.

Easy accuracy

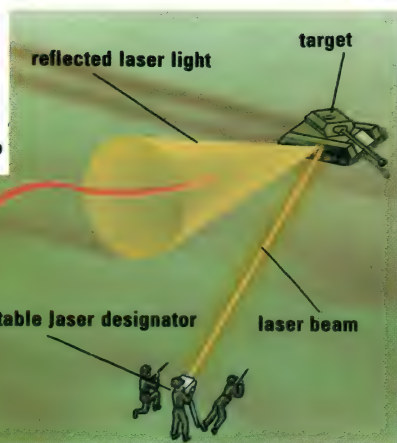
The bomb has no propulsion system so its trajectory can only be altered slightly. But laser target designation means that pinpoint accuracy is no longer required. The pilot only has to drop his bomb in the right area – an enormous advantage in battle.

Where a forward air controller



Paveway

main wing assembly



reflected laser light

target

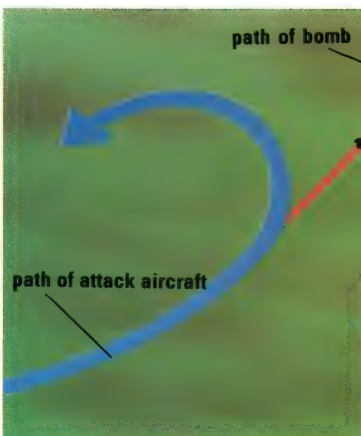
path of bomb

portable laser designator

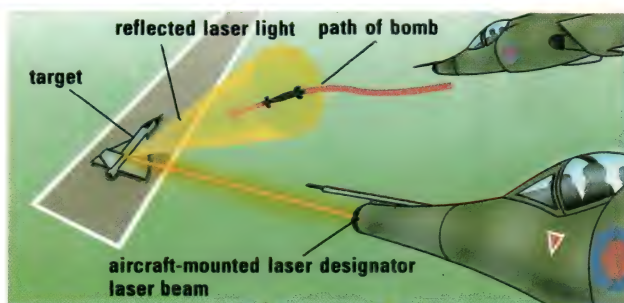
laser beam



Ferranti/TRH Pictures



path of attack aircraft



reflected laser light

path of bomb

target

aircraft-mounted laser designator
laser beam

The guided bomb Paveway has small steerable wings on its nose cone (top) which guide the bomb down the cone of laser light reflected from the target.

cannot get within line of sight of the target, another aircraft with a laser designator mounted on it can pinpoint the target while a bomber delivers the high explosive.

Artillery forward observation officers also use laser target markers to guide 'smart' shells. This dramatically increases the effectiveness of artillery.

On target

In aircraft, laser equipment is also used to provide accurate target ranges. Bombs may be dropped automatically with remarkable precision, after a computer has made allowances for even minute variables such as wind speed and direction.

On land, too, lasers are used to gauge distances accurately. Before a



GEO Ferranti

Although British ships already had a number of anti-aircraft defence systems, including missiles and rapid-firing heavy machine guns, it was considered unwise to use such hostile armaments in sensitive situations.

Laser weapons were first fitted in 1986 to ships serving in the Armilla patrol in the Arabian Gulf where Britain played a key role in escorting merchant ships at risk from attack during the Iran/Iraq war. Each of the three navy ships serving in the Gulf had two laser weapons. More recently the devices have been fitted to ships serving in the Falklands.

Blinding light

The laser weapon sends out a powerful beam of light that at a range of 1 kilometre can temporarily blind an enemy pilot. This will force the pilot to abandon his bombing run or, if he manages to remain on course, to drop his bombs wide of the target. The system is not powerful enough to cause permanent damage to the eyesight and is designed to be used in situations where blowing an attacking aircraft from the skies is liable to provoke further hostilities.

In the early 1990s, following the break up of the Soviet Union and reduced threat of nuclear war laser research was directed towards developing a global defence system against the impact of asteroids from space.

Just amazing!

SHARP SHOOTING
LASERS ARE SO ACCURATE THAT A BEAM CAN HIT A TARGET 20 MM ACROSS - THE SIZE OF A SMALL COIN - AT A RANGE OF 2 KM.



Paul Raymond

tank fires its main armament, for example, it must be sure it knows the range of its target. Otherwise, with the curved trajectory of the projectile, it is likely to miss. Until very recently, tanks fired special ranging machine guns to estimate distance. These shot glowing tracer rounds that could easily be seen hitting, falling short or going high. When tracer was on target, the appropriate range was set and main gun fired.

But this procedure was time consuming and warned the enemy. Anyone seeing tracer coming knew what was coming next and took evasive action. Now though, at the press of a button, a laser range finder will give an instant readout of the distance to the target, leaving the enemy no time to move.

The Royal Navy has been using a laser weapon to defend its ships.

- ☐ BUTTON CELLS
- ☐ SOLAR CELLS
- ☐ ELECTRIC CARS

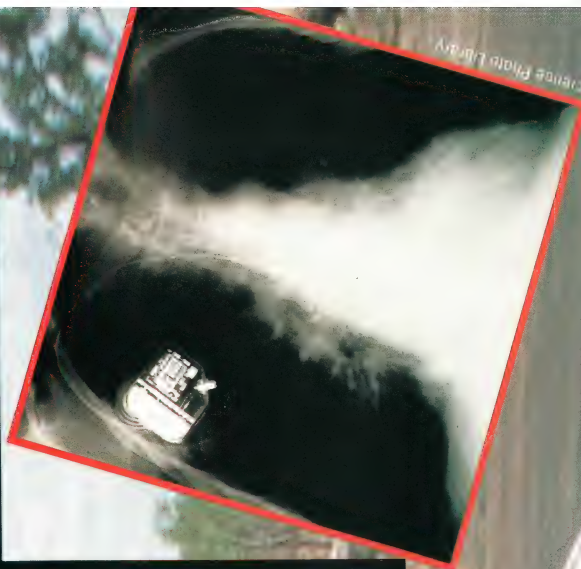
POWER PACKS

FROM THE TINY CELLS that run hearing aids and electronic watches, to the bulky batteries used to start cars, portable power is available in a variety of forms to serve every imaginable modern need.

A battery consists of one or more cells. Ordinary cells produce electricity on demand through a series of chemical reactions. They exploit the fact that many chemical reactions involve the transfer of electrons from one atom to another. An atom or group of atoms that carries an electric charge is called an ion.

In a cell, ions are supplied by a chemical solution or paste called the electrolyte. Cells are made in such a way that negative ions - those with an excess of electrons - collect at one point, and positive ions, which are

An array of solar cells can produce enough energy from sunlight to power an electric car (below left). The battery in a heart pacemaker (below) can last for up to ten years.





Black & Decker

Battery-operated tools are convenient to use as there are no trailing mains leads. After use, this electronic screwdriver is attached to a wall-mounted mains unit to ensure that its batteries are fully charged when it is next required.

ducting paste of ammonium chloride, zinc chloride, manganese dioxide and carbon particles.

In a cylindrically-shaped cell, the carbon rod, capped with steel, emerges as the positive terminal at the top. The bottom of the zinc casing, or a thin steel covering directly in contact with it, acts as the battery's negative terminal.

Increased output

A cell of this kind, whatever its size, will supply 1.5 volts. Making it bigger simply increases the maximum current that the cell can supply. Higher voltages are obtained by combining several cells in one battery. For instance, a 9-volt battery contains six 1.5-volt cells joined together in series, a 6-volt, four and so on.

Zinc-carbon batteries have the advantage of being cheap. But more expensive types of

rent flows through the battery in the opposite direction to normal. As a result, the chemicals in the electrolyte are once again returned to their original state, so the battery can once again supply current.

Solar cells

Some equipment runs on cells that last a lifetime but never need charging. Many pocket calculators, for example, are powered by solar cells. These convert the energy of daylight, or artificial light, into electricity.

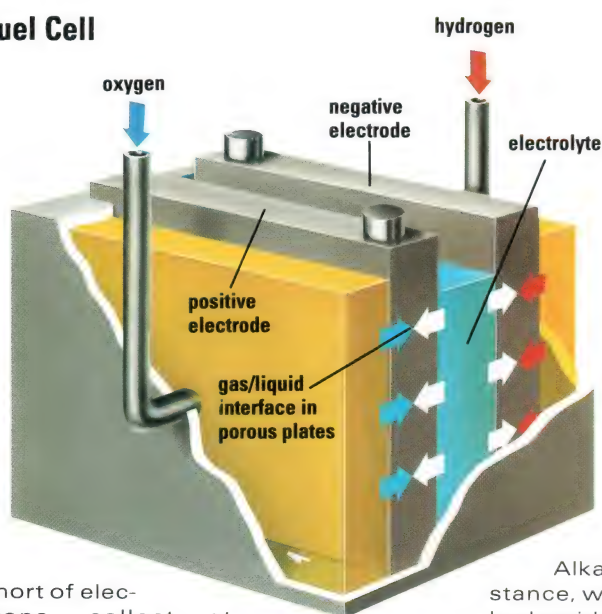
Wherever there is enough light to see the numbers on the calculator's display, the cells should generate

Portable lap-top computers have revolutionized many fields of work. Data can now be entered directly, wherever it is collected.



Ivaldi/Jerrican

Fuel Cell



short of electrons, collect at another point. These collection points, called electrodes, are in contact with the electrolyte. A terminal on each electrode allows the cell to be connected to a circuit. When this is done, a stream of electrons flows from the negative terminal to the positive. This flow of electrons is an electric current.

Standard cells

The most common type of cell is the zinc-carbon type. A carbon rod in the middle of the battery acts as the positive electrode, while an outer casing of zinc serves the dual purpose of container and negative electrode. Between the two electrodes is the electrolyte - in this case, a moist, con-

The fuel cell may power cars of the future. In the type of fuel cell shown here, hydrogen and oxygen gases pass through the porous electrodes, combine with the electrolyte, and produce electricity in the process.

sufficient power to operate the electronic circuits inside.

Even experimental cars have been powered by solar cells, but a more promising power source for future electric vehicles is the fuel cell. This produces electricity by combining hydrogen and oxygen gases. Unlike today's petrol-powered vehicles, a car running on a fuel cell would not pollute the environment - the only waste product would be water.

battery give better performance. Alkaline batteries, for instance, which use potassium hydroxide as the electrolyte, last longer. They also work more efficiently at low temperatures.

The miniature button cells used in electronic watches, hearing aids and some calculators and cameras employ layers of zinc powder and either mercury oxide or silver oxide as electrodes, with potassium hydroxide in between as the electrolyte.

Rechargeable cells

Most batteries have to be thrown away when they run down. But a nickel-cadmium battery, though marginally more expensive, can be charged up very cheaply over and over again. This is done by inserting it in a mains-supplied recharging unit.

During recharging, an electric cur-

Just amazing!

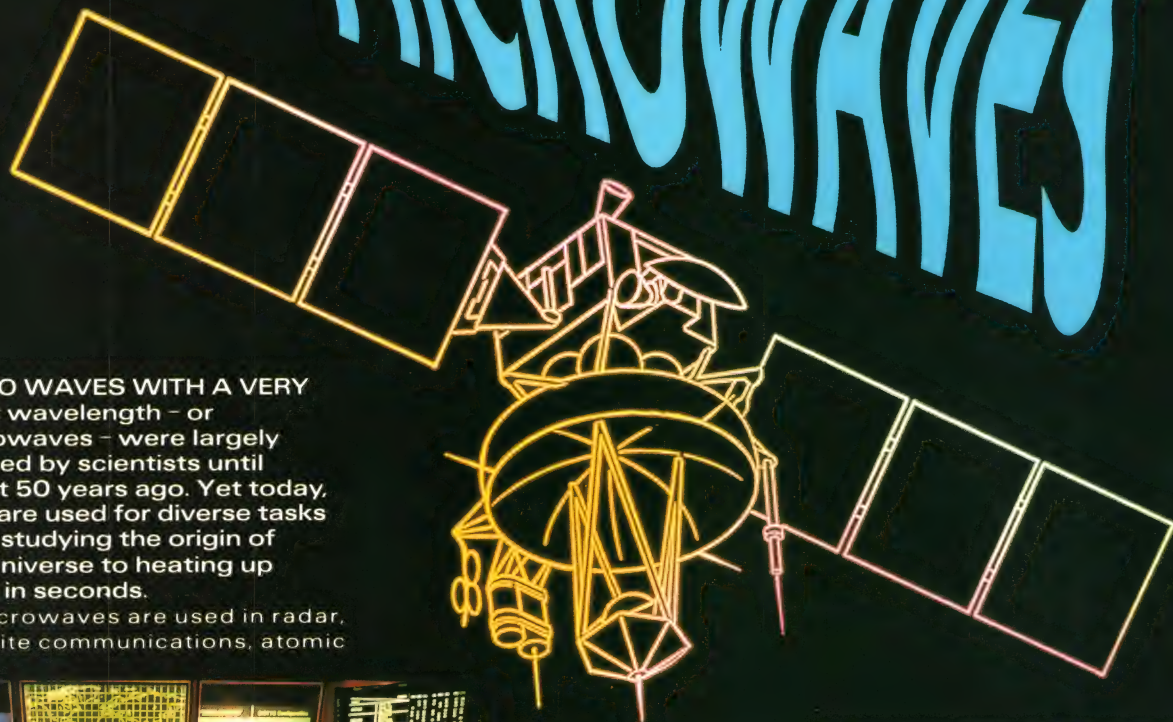
PURCHASING POWER

ELECTRICAL ENERGY FROM THE BUTTON CELLS USED IN ELECTRONIC WATCHES, COSTS ABOUT 175,000 TIMES AS MUCH AS POWER FROM THE MAINS.



Paul Raymond

MICROWAVES



RADIO WAVES WITH A VERY short wavelength - or microwaves - were largely ignored by scientists until about 50 years ago. Yet today, they are used for diverse tasks from studying the origin of the Universe to heating up pizza in seconds.

Microwaves are used in radar, satellite communications, atomic

clocks and cookers. Microwave energy is a type of electrical energy that can be transmitted through Space.

Communications

Microwave signals carrying television, telephone and computer data can be relayed by an orbiting satellite between two points on the Earth's surface. The microwaves are beamed up to the satellite - usually at

An Earth-orbiting satellite can, at any one time, handle two TV channels, 12,000 telephone conversations and computer data via microwaves.

Communications between spacecraft and ground control use microwaves because of their ability to penetrate the Earth's atmosphere. One user is the European Space Agency's Operation Centre (above) in Darmstadt, Germany.



a fixed position in the sky – from an Earth station – a large dish-shaped transmitter. Signals are boosted and shifted to a different frequency before being transmitted to a different part of the Earth's surface. The signals are picked up, by another large dish antenna for distribution to homes and workplaces, or, if the signals are powerful enough, they may be collected directly by small rooftop dishes.

COSMIC WAVES



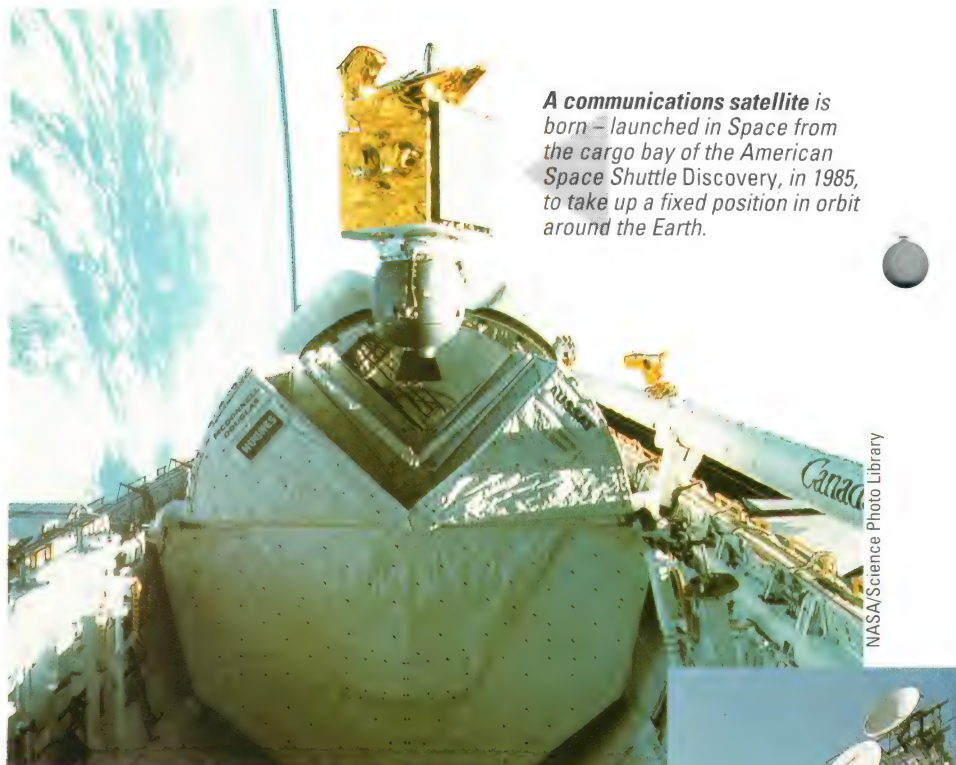
In 1965, American scientists Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson were studying natural sources of microwaves in Space that cause interference in telephone lines. They discovered a weak microwave 'glow' at a wavelength of 7.35 cm, coming from all parts of the sky. This cosmic microwave background is now believed to be the remains of the colossal explosion, or Big Bang, which formed the Universe.

A spacecraft called COBE (Cosmic Background Explorer) was launched in 1989 to carry out a two year study of the microwave background from Earth orbit. Two of COBE's detectors were chilled by liquid helium to within 2° of absolute zero so that they did not radiate more microwaves than they were trying to detect. These instruments were so sensitive that they could detect the power received by a postage stamp in London from a light bulb in Liverpool. From tiny variations in the cosmic background, astronomers hope to determine when and how the first galaxies formed.

On ground level, microwave links connect electronic news gathering (ENG) teams with their central television station. This avoids interference with longer radio waves that broadcast television and radio.

Microwaves for long-distance communications are generated by a

The Sun emits energy as waves of electromagnetic radiation. The longer their wavelength the shorter their frequency. Microwaves bridge the gap between normal radio waves and infra-red (heat waves). Radio frequencies range from EHF (extra high frequency) to VLF (very low frequency).



A communications satellite is born – launched in Space from the cargo bay of the American Space Shuttle Discovery, in 1985, to take up a fixed position in orbit around the Earth.

NASA/Science Photo Library

device called a maser. Just as lasers give out bright, pure beams of light, so masers produce intense, narrow beams of microwaves at a single frequency. Masers work by energizing the molecules of certain crystals, liquids or gases, causing them to give off a flood of photons.

Masers

In an ammonia maser, for instance, excited molecules vibrate with a natural frequency of 24,000 million times per second. Introducing a weak input beam of exactly this frequency triggers a chain reaction in which large numbers of the excited molecules drop to a low energy state – in the process giving off an intense beam of 24,000 MHz (1.25 cm) microwaves. Because of this precision, ammonia masers are used as a frequency or time standard and form the basis of atomic clocks.

Radar

Being highly sensitive, masers are also used to amplify or detect electromagnetic radiation – including very weak radio signals in Space (see Cos-

Fixed aerials used for amplifying and relaying microwave signals are called repeaters. These must be spaced within line of sight, across country because microwaves are unable to pass through obstructions, such as hills or buildings.



mic waves box) and are used in long-distance radar systems.

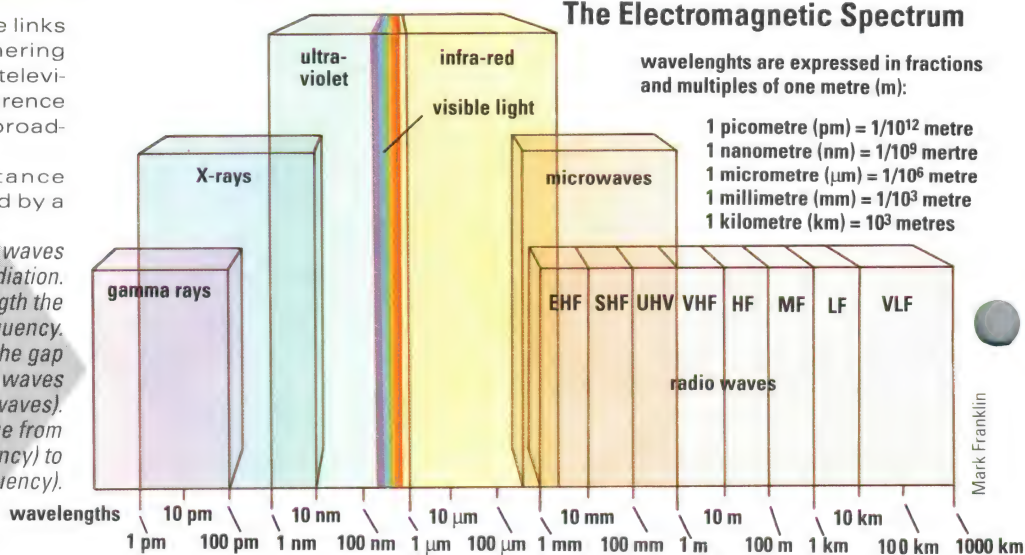
Radar (Radio Detection And Ranging) bounces radio waves off distant objects. The radio waves are sent out in a sweeping, focused beam and the returning signal is detected by an antenna. They are used to calculate the distance, heading and speed of, for example, an aircraft.

Ordinary radio waves are too long to be able to 'see' clearly an object as

The Electromagnetic Spectrum

wavelengths are expressed in fractions and multiples of one metre (m):

1 picometre (pm) = 1/10¹² metre
1 nanometre (nm) = 1/10⁹ metre
1 micrometre (μm) = 1/10⁶ metre
1 millimetre (mm) = 1/10³ metre
1 kilometre (km) = 10³ metres



Mark Franklin



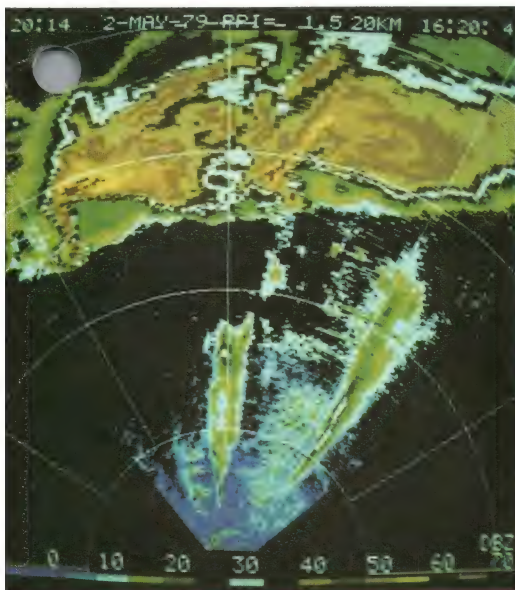
Radar equipment onboard the H M S Yarmouth alerts the ship to the range and bearing of the coastline and location of other vessels in the surrounding area.

James Nettis/Science Photo Library



Radar consoles in the control room at Philadelphia International Airport, USA, show aircraft flight maps and warn of weather problems. Radar, in conjunction with advanced instrument landing systems, can land aircraft fully automatically if required.

A tornado developing in Northern Oklahoma, USA, shows up on a radar display screen as a brown/yellow peninsular area to the left of this picture.



small as an aeroplane. Microwaves have a shorter wavelength and hence a greater ability to resolve detail.

Storm warning

Microwave beams from an airliner's weather radar allow a pilot to see many kilometres ahead to spot storms. Microwaves pass straight through clear air and ice crystals. But water droplets, or hail with a film of rain water, partly reflect the radar beam, creating echoes that show up on a radar screen. These echoes are processed by computer and colour-coded so that areas of heavy rain appear red, while those of lighter rain

show as yellow or green. If the radar data indicates a thunderstorm ahead, the pilot will call ground control for permission to chart a course around it.

The magnetron

Very long-distance radar uses masers to generate microwave signals but most radar systems employ a simple device called a magnetron. Inside a magnetron, a negatively charged electrode, in the centre of a vacuum-filled space, acts as a source of electrons.

The electrons (tiny negative charges), are drawn across the airless gap by the positive charge on a surrounding electrode. At the same time, the electrons are influenced by a powerful magnetic field. This makes the electrons spiral rapidly as they move outwards, causing them to give off microwaves. The shape of the gap and the strength of the magnetic field determine the precise frequency of the microwaves given off.

A magnetron is also the main com-

ponent of a microwave cooker used to cook and heat food and also thaw it from frozen. Microwaves themselves contain no heat. It is their effect on water molecules that in turn heats food (see box p 134).

Core temperature

Microwaves are reflected by metal, are partly absorbed by water and pass straight through non-metallic substances such as plastic. All inner surfaces of the microwave cooker are metallic to reflect microwaves towards the food placed inside.

Because they are absorbed by water molecules, microwaves penetrate food to a depth of only 5 cm. The centre of a large piece of meat is cooked by heat conducted from the outside – just as your hands heat up when you rub them together. Tests on pre-cooked meals have shown microwave cooking to be less effective with salty food. Salt contains ions (charged atoms or groups of atoms) that flow under the influence of the

electric field of microwave radiation. This stops the microwaves penetrating food sufficiently to heat it to a temperature that kills the organisms that can cause food poisoning.

Microwaves may be the key to long term food preservation. Food could be effectively sterilized by heat-

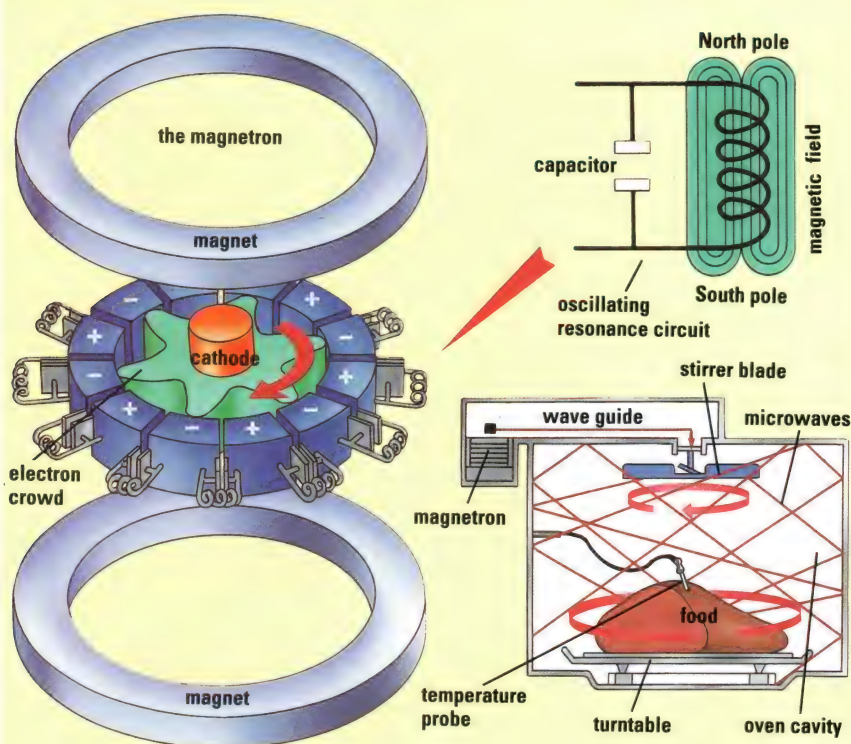
Just amazing!

TIME-KEEPING

THE WORLD'S MOST ACCURATE CLOCKS ARE BASED ON TWO HYDROGEN MASERS AT THE US NAVAL RESEARCH CENTRE IN WASHINGTON, USA. THEY KEEP TIME TO WITHIN 1 SECOND IN 700,000 YEARS.

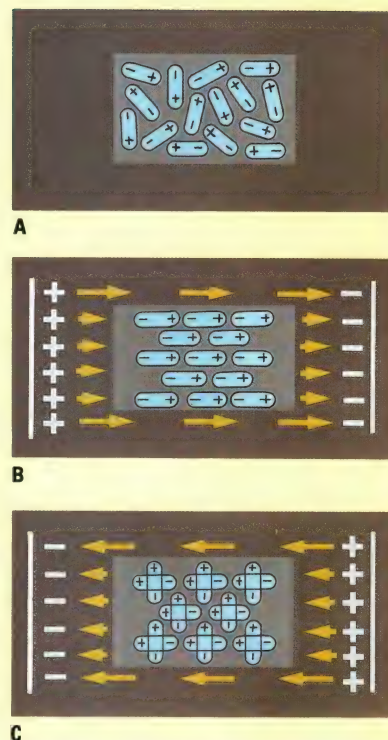


Paul Raymond



At the core of a microwave cooker is a magnetron. Inside, a heated cathode, within a magnetic field, emits electrons that crowd and spin outwards. In passing the tips of the resonance circuits the electrons cause rapid positive and negative field reversals that in turn produce microwaves.

Water molecules have two magnetic poles (one positive and one negative). These molecules are randomly arranged in food (A) until aligned by applying an electrostatic field – microwaves (B). Alternating the field rapidly 'flips' the molecules (C) causing frictional heating that cooks the food.



MICROWAVE PLANE



This is the world's first pilotless, microwave-powered aircraft. An operational prototype being developed from the test model, in Canada, at a cost of some £15 million, will have a fuselage 24 metres long and a wingspan of 36.5 metres. Powered by about 12 transmitters onboard and controlled from Earth, the craft will fly at twice the height of most conventional aircraft.

The microwave craft will be less expensive to operate – at around £125,000 per year – than the largest telecommunications satellite. It will also be more powerful than any satellite and capable of uninterrupted and easily controlled flight – allowing it to be brought back to Earth for data collection and repairs.

Kitted out with a transmitter the craft could serve an area 600 km in diameter. Alternatively the craft could be ideally suited to help study pollution. It could, for example, measure levels of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide in the atmosphere from an altitude of 120 metres.



ing it to 250°C for three minutes to kill all harmful bacteria, before sealing it in bacteria-free packages. This would increase the shelf life of some foods to years rather than days.

Destroying tumours

One very important development in the application of microwaves is in the field of medicine. It has been discovered that cancerous tumours are killed by heating them to 109°C. Some success has been achieved with microwave treatment of patients

Experimental treatment of tumours using microwaves relies on the fact that cancerous cells are more easily destroyed by heat than normal tissue.

whose cancerous cells are on or close to the surface of the skin.

Efforts are continuing to find how to heat tumours consistently and to accurately measure the temperature of tumours being treated. Work is also being carried out to reduce side effects that include burns and blistering.

Q THUNDERSTORMS

Q ELECTRORECEPTORS

Q BRAINWAVES

LIVING VOLTS

Lightning strikes the ground some 6,000 times a minute often with devastating results. In the USA alone, lightning kills over 100 people a year.

FROM MIGHTY BOLTS OF lightning to tiny currents in the human brain, electricity takes many forms in the natural world. Some animals can even detect the weak electrical waves given off by other creatures nearby.

The most awesome displays of natural electricity occur during thunderstorms. At any moment, between 1,500 and 2,000 thunderstorms are taking place around the world.

A thunderstorm starts to brew

Tony Stone Photo Library, London



Scientists are sceptical about the existence of ball lightning, but there are many eye-witness accounts. Glowing spheres up to a metre across have been seen inside closed rooms and even aircraft, as well as in the open air.

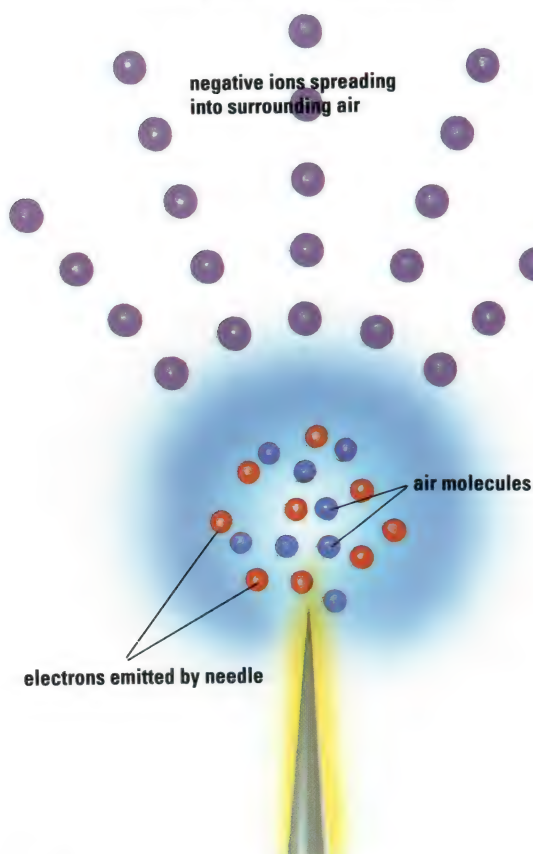
when a mass of cold air moves on top of a body of hot, humid air. Violent up and down draughts tear at the water droplets, ice crystals, and hailstones inside the developing storm-cloud, causing static electricity to build up.

● Giant battery

Smaller particles, carrying a positive charge, rise to the top of the cloud. At the same time, larger, negatively-charged drops and hailstones gather at the cloud's base. This separation of charge effectively turns the cloud into a giant battery capable of generating a sudden, enormous spark. Underneath the cloud, a positive charge is induced at ground level. A cloud-to-

Bead lightning above Los Alamos, New Mexico, USA. Sometimes the main lightning flash breaks up into luminous sections, or 'beads', as it fades.

How an Air Ionizer Works



Ions are tiny electrically charged particles in the air; negative ions are air molecules that have acquired an extra electron. When the level of negative ions in air indoors and in cities is increased, people become less tense and more alert. Negative air ions can be created in an air ionizer by sending high voltage electrical charges through one or more needles. High velocity electrons are emitted by the electric field at the tip of the needle.

ground lightning flash begins with an invisible discharge, called a leader, that branches downward. This carries a negative charge towards the Earth's surface and creates a trail of ionized air (ions are atoms that have been charged by stripping their electrons).

● Discharges

As a branch of the leader comes to within roughly 100 metres of the ground, the negative charge in the air attracts the positive charge near the ground. Discharges then form at the ground and travel upwards until they meet the leader. When contact is made, the first bright return stroke occurs. This is the start of the lightning strike. The return stroke, with a peak current of between 10,000 and 40,000 amps, races back up the trail of ionized air into the cloud.

● The leader

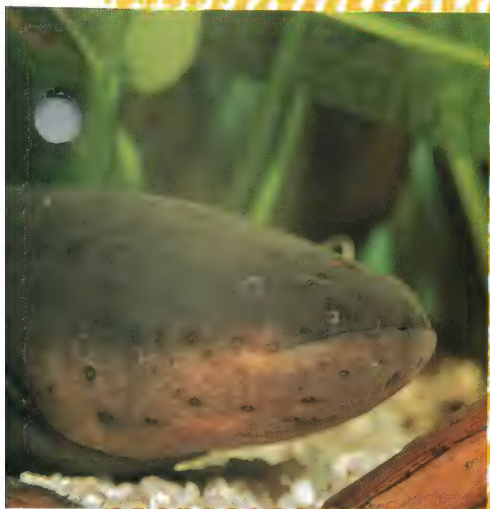
After a pause of a few tens of micro-seconds, another leader comes down, triggering a second return stroke. Most lightning flashes consist of three or four leaders and return strokes, though as many as 40 have been observed. The bright flash we see comes from the upward moving return strokes.

Sometimes a leader travels only part of the way down an existing ionized channel, then forges a different



One flash of cloud-to-ground lightning strikes at one two-thousandth the speed of light with a power of up to 200,000 amps. This tree in Utah, USA, was struck by such a force.

ELECTRIC EELS



Hans Reinhard/Bruce Coleman Ltd

The electric eel of South America is one of the few creatures in the world that can kill its prey by electrocution. Measuring up to 2.5 metres in length and 22 kg in weight, the electric eel has three pairs of electric organs on each side of its body. These living batteries can produce either a continuous, low-voltage discharge to help sense the surroundings or a sudden shock, strong enough to stun a man. At full strength, the eel can generate 650 volts, usually in three to five bursts lasting about two thousandths of a second.

path to the ground. In such cases, forked lightning is seen. On other occasions, discharges take place between neighbouring clouds without reaching the surface at all. This gives rise to sheet lightning.

Because lightning usually seeks out the highest object, tall or isolated trees and exposed hill tops are especially dangerous places to be in a thunderstorm. Metal structures are also a hazard.

Blue sparks

In 1955, at the racecourse in Ascot, southern England, lightning ripped along metal railings in a series of blue sparks that jolted nearby spectators over a metre into the air. Two people were killed and 47 were injured.

Metal jewellery, such as a medalion, has been known to draw lightning. Even making a phone call during a thunderstorm has its risks. In 1988, a woman in Sheffield, England, was burned on her ear and thigh when lightning struck the telephone wires and passed through her body.

Ball lightning

A single flash can carry over 10,000 amps at 30,000°C – more than enough to reduce human flesh and bone to ashes. Whether or not a lightning strike is deadly, depends on the path it takes through the body to the ground. About three-quarters of those

who are struck suffer only burns. However, if most of the current passes through a major organ, such as the brain or heart, it can kill.

Less common and more mysterious than ordinary lightning is ball lightning. This occurs during thunderstorms, though it has been seen in fair weather too. A typical 'ball' measures some 25 cm across and glows a pale

Testing for deafness. A device called the Nicolet Pathfinder measures tiny changes in the brain's electrical activity caused by sounds sent through the baby's headphones. The changes are recorded by an EEG. By comparing the output (seen on screen) with 'normal' results, hearing problems can be identified.



An electric ray stuns the fish on which it preys with a powerful electric current produced by organs in the head and back. This can measure up to 220 volts.

The platypus, found only in eastern Australia and Tasmania, locates its prey by detecting the weak electric fields radiated by other animals with its leathery, sensitive, duck-like bill.



red or orange colour. It may have a halo around it or give off sparks. Ball lightning can last for a minute, or even longer, before either exploding violently or simply fading away.

Strangest of all, ball lightning has a

habit of seeking out the insides of buildings or aircraft. Witnesses report having seen it floating around the rooms of a house, steering clear of the furniture, before disappearing up the chimney or out of the door.

So far, scientists have failed to fully explain this phenomenon. It is likely that the ball contains plasma, or highly ionized gases at high temperatures.

But the mechanism by which such a large amount of energy can be contained in such a compact form for so long is not well understood.

Natural electricity on a much smaller scale is vital to the functioning of our bodies. Electrical signals travelling along nerve cells to and from the brain allow us to sense our surroundings and to respond by moving muscles. An individual nerve impulse registers less than a tenth of a volt and travels at a speed of up to

Alexander Tsiras/Science Photo Library

Roy Manston/Planet Earth Pictures

ANT/NHPA

100 metres per second. This means that the longest delay for an impulse making a round trip between the brain and any part of the body is less than 0.04 of a second.

Each nerve cell, called a *neuron*, is

SAFETY TIPS IN THUNDERSTORMS



Gamma/Frank Spooner Pictures

If you are outside:

- Run for shelter (a building or car) but avoid small sheds or tents in open areas
- Stay clear of tall objects such as trees, telephone poles and boat masts
- Get out of and away from water
- Avoid metal objects, such as traffic signs, posts and fences
- If you are with a group of people, make sure you are at least 10 metres away from each other
- Squat with your knees tucked together. Do not lie on the ground!

If you are inside:

- Do not stand or sit near doors or windows
- Turn off TVs, stereos, computers and radios and do not use the telephone
- Do not take a bath or shower, or wash anything in the sink.

water, for instance. Some animals, such as the duck-billed platypus, are equipped to sense these fields, which help them to navigate and find food. The side of its bill is lined with a number of electroreceptors that react to impulses as low as 20 millivolts (thousandths of a volt) occurring at a rate of up to 600 per second.

Electrical signals

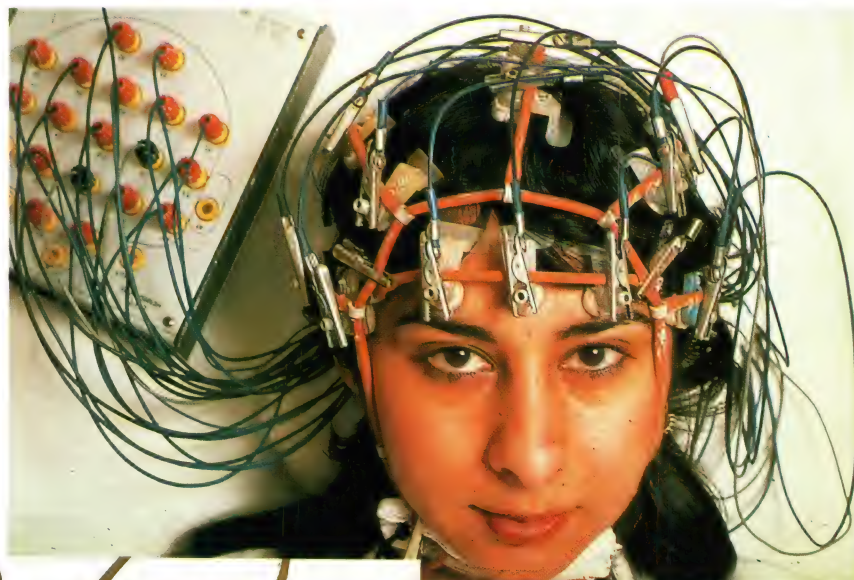
This means that the platypus can sense, for example, the tiny electrical signals passing between nerves and muscles in the tail of a shrimp – a favourite prey. The snout of the spiny anteater, another Australian mammal, can also detect electrical waves.

Sharks, and certain other fishes as well, have electroreceptors in their bodies. The shark's face is pitted with hundreds of minute holes, called the ampullae of Lorenzini, which can pick up the electrical waves radiated by fish swimming nearby.

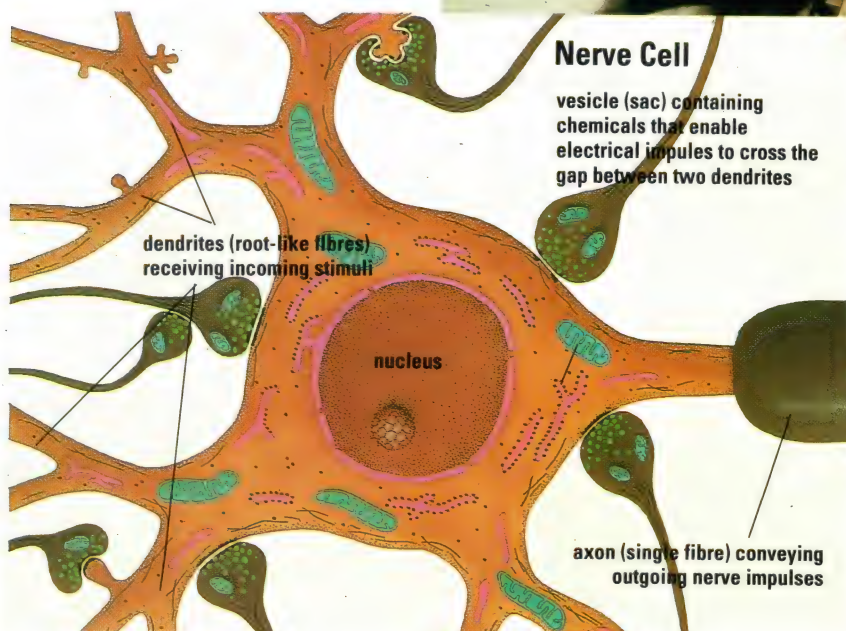
like a tiny, insulated wire. The nerve impulse moves along the narrow conducting fibre in the centre. A surrounding sheath made of the protein myelin acts in the same way as plastic insulation around an ordinary electric wire.

The end of each neuron branches out into many tiny pathways, known as *dendrites*. These are separated from the dendrites of neighbouring neurons by narrow gaps called *synapses*. For the short hop across a synapse, signals are transferred chemically rather than electrically.

The greatest concentration of neurons – about 10 billion of them – is in the brain itself. Millions of electrical impulses criss-cross the brain each second, even while we are asleep.



Jerry Mason/Science Photo Library



Nerve Cell

vesicle (sac) containing chemicals that enable electrical impulses to cross the gap between two dendrites

dendrites (root-like fibres) receiving incoming stimuli

nucleus

axon (single fibre) conveying outgoing nerve impulses

Electric currents that pass through the brain can be recorded by an EEG, properly called an electroencephalograph.

Collectively, these impulses are responsible for all our thoughts, memories and sensations.

Weak electric fields are produced by all living creatures as well as by many non-living objects – streams of

Electric impulses, sent from one nerve cell to the next, travel to the brain with information about the body's surroundings, then out again with instructions on how the body should react.

Just amazing!

THE BIG HEAT

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING CAN REACH TEMPERATURES AS HIGH AS 30,000°C – MORE THAN FIVE TIMES THE HEAT OF THE SURFACE OF THE SUN.



Paul Raymond

Q ELECTROMAGNETISM

Q LINES OF FORCE

Q SOUND RECORDING

NATURAL ATTRACTION

AT THE HEART OF MODERN technology such as motors, videotape recorders and atom smashers lies one of the fundamental natural forces: magnetism.

In ancient times it was known that a type of iron ore called magnetite attracts certain metals, such as iron, nickel and cobalt. Magnetite was once commonly called lodestone, which means 'guiding stone', because it was discovered – originally by the Chinese – that if a light, thin 'needle' of magnetite was pivoted, it would always swing so that it pointed roughly in a north-south direction. The end that is attracted to the north is called the magnet's north pole; the end that



A particle detector at the European Centre for Particle Physics near Geneva. Subatomic particles are bent into a curved path by the magnetic field and are then smashed together.

The magnetic field of a bar magnet is shown by iron filings that group along the lines of force, forming closed loops around the poles.

is attracted to the south is called the magnet's south pole. Every magnet has two such poles. The magnetic attraction seems to be centred in them. If a bar-shaped magnet is dipped into iron filings, they will cluster around its poles – few will cling to the central part of the magnet.

Magnetic attraction

If a magnet is cut in half, new poles will appear, so that each of the pieces has both a north and a south pole. If the two pieces are put together, pole to pole, the opposite poles will cancel each other out. The two combined will be just the same as the single original magnet.

A magnetized piece of iron is divided into millions of regions called 'domains', typically from 1/100 to 1/10 cm across, and visible under the microscope. If these tiny 'magnets' point the same way, their magnetism will combine, making the whole piece of iron into a magnet. If they become

disordered, pointed in all directions, they will cancel each other out. Though each domain continues to be a small magnet, the iron as a whole loses its magnetism.

If you place two magnets close to each other, you will soon find that their north poles repel each other (push each other away), while the

north pole of one attracts the south pole of the other – 'like poles repel, unlike poles attract'.

Wandering poles

We know that the Earth behaves like a magnet from using a compass, therefore the Earth also has north and south magnetic poles.

These 'geomagnetic' poles lie 1,400–2750 km from the geographical poles at present, but they wander erratically around over the course of centuries. (Since the north magnetic pole attracts the north-seeking end of a compass needle, and since unlike poles attract, it is itself a south-seeking pole!)

A magnetic compass is useless anywhere near the geomagnetic poles. Even

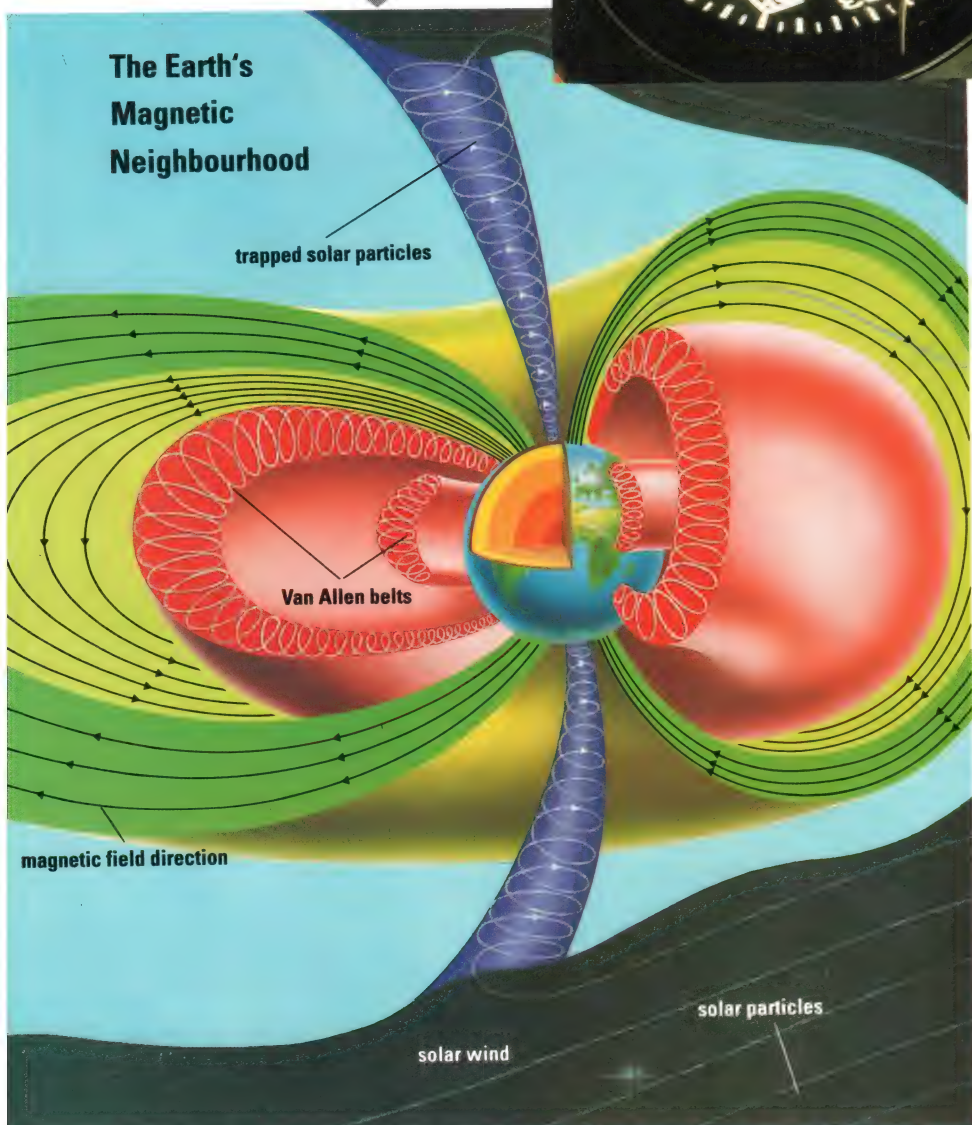
A mariner's compass showing a 360° conical card that rests on a jewelled bearing in a bowl filled with liquids. The pointer, at approximately 330°, shows the sailor his compass bearing.

A levitating magnet above a superconductor. The powerful magnetic fields created by superconductors can be used as the basis for magnetic levitation – MAGLEV – trains.



C-Plath

The Earth's magnetic field – the magnetosphere – is distorted by the solar wind. Charged particles from the Sun are trapped in spiral paths in radiation belts known as Van Allen belts.



ZEFA

elsewhere, it is necessary to know the magnetic 'declination' – the angle between true north and the direction shown by a compass. This information is recorded in tables or on maps, that have to be updated every year.

The influence of a magnet may be pictured by means of 'lines of force'. At every point around the magnet the direction of the line of force through it shows the direction of the magnetic force – as shown, for example, by the

Nick Farmer

Boxmag-Rapid Ltd



direction in which a small magnetic compass placed at that point would lie. The direction of the line is defined as being from the magnet's north pole toward its south pole.

Lines of force spread out from a magnet's north pole, loop around it, then vanish into its south pole. They are crowded together where the

Industrial magnets use a powerful electromagnet to lift bundles of bars. The electric current is switched off to release the load once it is in position.

Recycling metal, from shredded waste, is easily achieved by magnetic drum separators. The metal is then added to new iron or steel ingots in a furnace.

A Kirlian photograph of an electric discharge. This 'artificial lightning' has been created by dropping a small steel ball into a high-energy electrical field.

Eriez Magnetics UK Ltd



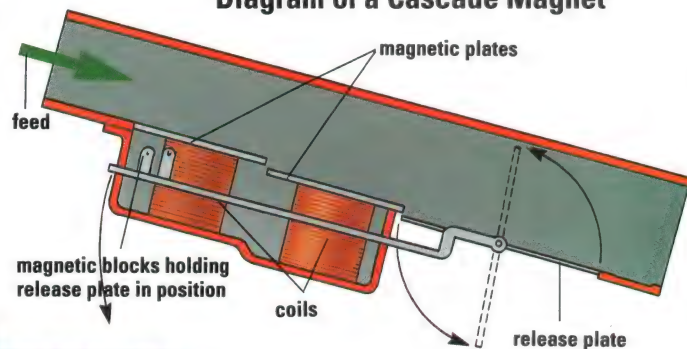
produce a field like that of a bar magnet. Such an electromagnet is convenient, since it can be turned on and off. And the more turns of wire it has, and the larger the current through the wire, the more powerful the electromagnet. It can be made more powerful yet by winding the coil round a piece of iron.

Atom smashers

Electromagnets are used for handling iron, steel and other magnetic metals. In scrapyards, for example, cranes

Mark Franklin

Diagram of a Cascade Magnet



A Cascade Magnet is used to remove metal contamination from dry, free-flowing materials. Its soft iron core is magnetised when electric current is passed through the wire coiled around it. Unlike permanent magnets, the electromagnet loses its magnetic properties when the surrounding current is stopped.

GAMMA RAYS

The first blow in a nuclear attack could consist of a wave of gamma rays – a type of electromagnetic radiation. If a one-megaton hydrogen bomb (an average-sized nuclear weapon) were exploded in Space, about 400 km high, a pulse of gamma rays would flood the Earth below. These would not threaten life directly, but would knock out electrical equipment.

If the bomb were exploded above the central United States, unprotected electrical and electronic equipment from the East coast to the West Coast would be affected. Military equipment can be specially protected against this EMP (electromagnetic pulse), but civilian equipment, especially radios, televisions and computers, would be heavily damaged at a single stroke – and before the first bomb had gone off at low altitudes.

equipped with electromagnets instead of hooks are used to pick up cars. Electromagnets are also used in giant metal shredders to separate scrap made of magnetic metal from other sorts of scrap.

Powerful electromagnets guide subatomic particles in accelerators ('atom-smashing' machines) used in nuclear research to investigate the

fields. Imagine a wire stretching vertically up out of this page. Imagine further that the Earth's magnetic field is shut out by enclosing the experiment in a metal cage. Now an electric current is switched on in the wire. The current consists of a stream of tiny particles called electrons, moving upwards along the wire.

Circular field

A small compass placed close to the wire will turn until it is pointing along the circumference of a circle centred on the wire. When the field lines are mapped with the aid of the compass, or with iron filings scattered on the page, they are found to be circles centred on the wire. Since they do not come together or spread out, this magnetic field has no poles. However, the field grows weaker farther away from the wire.

The wire can be made into an electromagnet that mimics a bar magnet. It is looped many times into a cylindrical coil and the magnetic fields of all the turns of wire add together to

Henry/Dakin/Science Photo Library



magnetism is strongest. The pattern formed by these lines of force is known as the 'field' of the magnet.

One of the most momentous discoveries in the history of science was that electric currents create magnetic

MAGNETIC STORMS

Magnetic compasses occasionally go awry, swinging back and forth, away from the true direction of magnetic north. At the same time radio transmissions may be disturbed, and power supplies may be disrupted. The cause lies 150 million kilometres away, in the Sun. Such a 'magnetic storm' is triggered some hours after a burst of high-energy particles has been fired into Space by a solar flare, a huge explosion on the Sun. The particles arrive at the Earth and are caught in the two Van Allen radiation belts – stores of trapped particles 10,200 km and 23,600 km high. This sudden flood of particles causes some of the contents of the belts to spill over and spiral down towards the magnetic poles along magnetic lines of force. As they do so they create wildly fluctuating fields that disturb compasses and generate stray voltages in electrical equipment.

many particles within the atom. The particles circulate around giant 'race-tracks', such as one near Geneva that is 27 km in circumference.

They move at close to the speed of light, being boosted electrically on every 'lap', so that they pick up more and more energy. Finally they smash into a target, such as a block of metal, or are 'collided' with another beam of particles. The particles are forced to

Earth, this results in a steady but complicated flow of fluid iron. This causes electric currents to flow in the core and create a magnetic field.

The Earth's field is very poorly understood. In particular, it is not known why it should fade away and then reappear, pointing the opposite way roughly every half-million years.

Sound and pictures

Magnetism is an important means of recording sound, video pictures and computer data. An audio tape consists of a thin film of polyester coated with a binder through which are dispersed needle-shaped particles of

Auroras occur mostly over polar latitudes and are caused by the collision of air molecules in the upper atmosphere with electrically charged particles from the Sun.

Magnetic tape is used for sound recording. The tape consists of a layer of powdered magnetic material, which registers the signals to be reproduced later as sound.

a result a pattern of strong and weak magnetization extends in a track along the tape. This pattern is a 'picture' of the sound waves that struck the recording microphone. There are four tracks, one pair in each direction. One track of each pair is for the left, the other for the right, stereo channel.

When the tape is played back, it moves past a coil similar to an electromagnet. The magnetic field from the tape passes through the coil, constantly fluctuating in strength. Such a varying field makes electric currents flow in the coil. These are boosted and drive loudspeakers, creating sound that is a copy of the sound that



National Centre for Atmospheric Research



Molmare

follow their curved paths by magnetic fields up to 20,000 times as strong as the Earth's. The electromagnets producing the field have to be positioned to within a fraction of a millimetre.

Electric currents

The Earth is not just a magnet but an electromagnet. Geomagnetism is caused by electric currents flowing in its iron core. The central core is crushed by huge pressure into a solid form, but the outer core is liquid iron. Hot fluid iron rises from deep in the outer core, cools and sinks again.

Combined with the rotation of the

iron oxide or chromium dioxide.

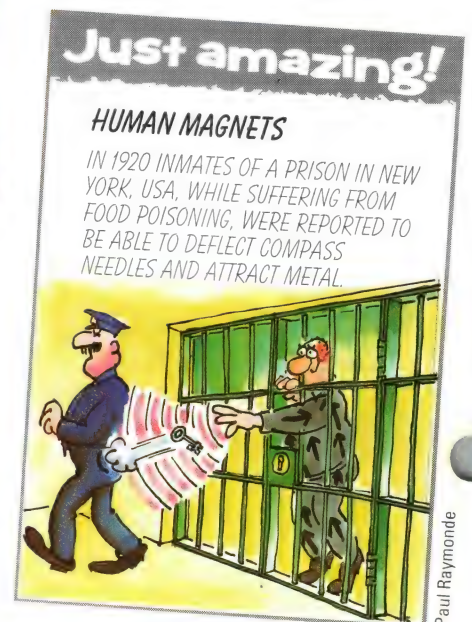
When a sound recording is made, the tape passes close to a recording head, which contains an electromagnet. The strength of the current through the recording head, and hence the strength of its magnetic field, varies according to the strength of the sound that is being recorded.

Four track recording

The field from the recording head magnetizes a small section of the magnetic oxide coating. Where the field is strong the particles of the coating become strongly magnetized. As

struck the recording microphones.

Recording a videotape works in much the same way, except that in addition to a track for the sound channel, the picture signal is laid down in a series of thin diagonal stripes, in order to pack in the vast amount of information that is needed to represent a television picture. A television picture represents an image as lines of dots. The pattern of magnetization on the videotape corresponds to those dots.



Paul Raymond

ROCK BOTTOM

Patrick Baker/Bruce Coleman Ltd

THE SHALLOW BEDS OF seas around the world are rich in a variety of useful minerals, animals and plants. But harvesting these resources can present a challenge to both men and machines.

Seabeds are the source of much of the sand and gravel needed for the building industry. Britain alone uses about 100 million tonnes annually, of which 10 per cent is pumped from the shallow waters of the continental shelf by dredgers and dumped into waiting barges. Major deposits of shells, such as those off the Bahamas, are also mined extensively as a source of lime for agriculture or for use in making cement.

Metal deposits

Being heavier than other rock fragments, metals tend to concentrate on the seabed. Rain and wind erode metal ores on land, and rivers then carry the particles of ore into the sea. The heavy specks of metal settle out of the water first, forming metal-rich sands called placer deposits. These usually start off as beach deposits, but as the sea-level changes and shorelines move with time, many placer deposits are now found

situated on the continental shelves.

Like sand and gravel, they can be mined by dredging. Gold has been obtained from placer deposits in Alaska, diamonds off the coast of Africa and ores of the metals titanium and zirconium in Australian waters.

Giant kelp

As knowledge of the structure and composition of the Earth's crust increases, geologists can predict the location of new sources of these and other minerals.

Ice-cream, toothpaste, plastics,

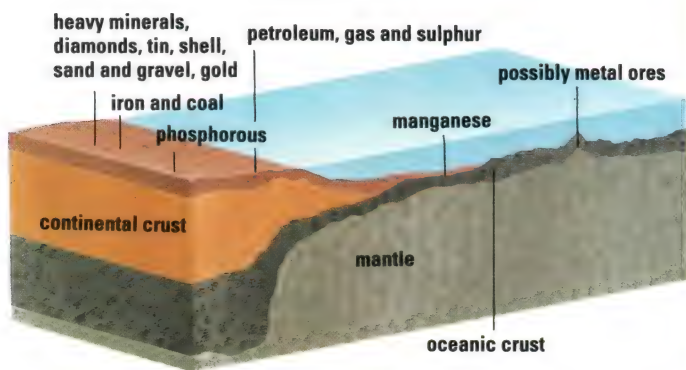
Shallow water dredges are dragged across the seabed by dredgers to recover minerals. Posidonia Australis (top), one of the few marine flowering plants, is used to make sack-

paint, make-up and medicines are among the many products made using seaweed. An enormous type of seaweed called Pacific giant kelp is found off the west coast of America. Measuring up to 60 m in length, it can grow 45 cm in a day.

The kelp is harvested by back-



Nicholas Penny/Planet Earth Pictures



Norbert Wu/Planet Earth Pictures



Ivaldi/Jerrican

Mark Franklin

Valuable mineral resources on the seabed can be surveyed in shallow continental shelf waters by divers while at deeper levels, drilling and other techniques are used to locate the deposits.

ward-moving boats that slice the tops off the plants with sharp, revolving blades and then drag them aboard. Later, the kelp is boiled in large vats and the jelly-like extract from it is used in manufacturing. Whole plants can be turned directly into animal feed and fertilizer.

The Japanese consume great quantities of seaweed, much of which is cultivated on special nets in Japan's shallow Inland Sea. Another edible seaweed, a delicate, red variety, grows naturally around Japan's shores and is collected from small boats using long, hooked poles.



Seaweed is now being used for a variety of high quality products such as a range of cosmetics, a type of dietary bread and a drink in which the plant is combined with sea water.

Kelp bulbs are not damaged by harvesting since the plant's long streamers are cut to just under a metre beneath the water. Cutting can even contribute to growth by allowing greater amounts of sunlight to reach the plants.

Gamma/Frank Spooner Pictures

Oysters

Oysters, clams, and shrimp are among the animals farmed in the sea. One oyster produces millions of eggs, which soon hatch into free-swimming larvae. The larvae attach themselves to any hard surface, normally a rock, and then develop into small oysters known as spat.

Oyster farmers distribute old oyster shells or even roofing tiles around the spawning grounds. They then collect these when coated with spat and transfer them to the shallow waters of a bay or estuary that has been cleared of starfish and other animals that eat oysters. Supported on wooden racks or suspended from wires, the oysters grow until they are ready to be harvested.

Pearls

A certain type of oyster, not the edible kind, produces pearls. This happens when a speck of grit gets inside the oyster's shell and acts as an irritant. The oyster builds up layers of a hard, lustrous chemical around the grit to protect itself.

In certain parts of Asia, skilled divers can stay underwater for several minutes while they search for natural pearl oysters on the seabed. But many pearls now come from farms in which tiny pieces of shell are placed inside the oysters. After three years, the oysters are opened and the so-called 'cultured' pearls removed.

Bathroom sponges

Most bathroom sponges today are man-made. However, the expensive, oddly-shaped, yellow sponges that you occasionally see on sale are the

soft skeletons of primitive animals that live on the seabed.

Sponges have been found at all depths, from the shallows of inland seas to the ocean floor 6,000 metres down. They obtain oxygen and food by circulating seawater through the numerous channels in their bodies.

Only a few varieties can be used as bathroom sponges. These are collected by divers working as deep as 30 metres without any special equipment. At first, the living sponges are greyish and slimy. To clean them, they are washed, stamped on, or beaten. Then the skeleton is trimmed with a knife ready to be sold.



Paul Raymond

Q ELECTRONS

Q POWER STATIONS

Q GENERATORS

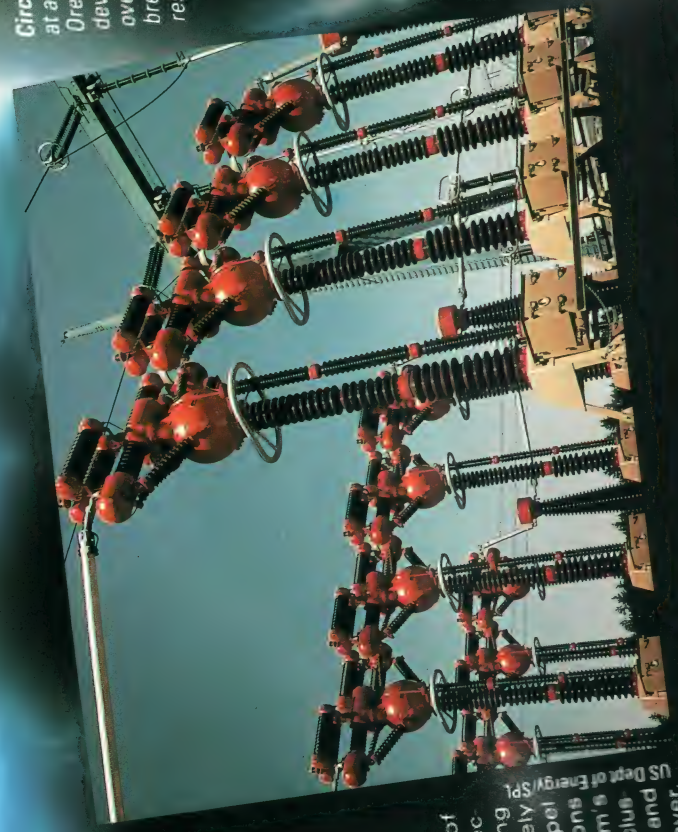
ELECTRICITY

A discharge of electricity flashes from one metal object to another. Metal has the kind of molecular structure that makes it an ideal conductor, so that it naturally attracts any unchannelled electricity.

WITH THE FLICK OF A SWITCH, a light, a stereo, a microwave oven or a computer comes instantly to life. These devices, and thousands of others that we take for granted in the modern world, work off electricity. But what is electricity and where does it come from?

An electrical current is a flow of tiny particles called electrons. Electrons are one of the basic building blocks of atoms, and are negatively charged; this means that they repel each other. Normally, the electrons swarm in clouds around the atom's nucleus, or centre, made up of a cluster of positively charged protons and neutrons. However, in some

Circuit breakers, like these ones at an electricity substation at Oregon City, USA, are a safety device. If lightning strikes an overhead cable, the circuit breakers switch off power to the rest of the cable to protect it.



US Dept of Energy/SP

Science Photo Library

some of the electrons are 'free' and orbit outside the atom. These free-electrons can travel in streams from one place to another, creating a current of electricity.

Substances such as metals, which contain many free or loosely held electrons, are known as conductors, since they allow electricity to pass through them very easily. Silver is one of the best conductors, but because it is so expensive...

The control room of a national grid system is the nerve centre of a country's electricity supply. Here, supply can be monitored, and then redirected to where it is needed.

Superconductivity is the wave of the future. Conductors at temperatures nearing -273°C - absolute zero - have almost no resistance to electricity. This means that a magnet can be held suspended in a loop of super-cold wire.

wastes energy. But if a substance is cooled down to a very low temperature, it loses its electrical resistance altogether. It is then said to be 'superconducting'. With no resistance to slow it down, a current could theoretically flow around a superconducting circuit forever.

Warm superconductors
Until recently, the highest temperature at which a substance was known to superconduct was -250°C ; the conductor was a metallic niobium-germanium alloy. But in 1986, there was a major breakthrough. Scientists discovered a number of complex materials containing metallic substances such as thallium, lanthanum and yttrium that would superconduct at around -126°C , a temperature warm

National Grid Co

Tony Stone Photo Library London

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The filament in a light made of very fine wire, keep bumping into the atoms of the wire, making them vibrate and glow white with heat.

so great that it affected the picture quality on many television sets!

All domestic electricity supplies are carried from the nearest substation by at least two wires, usually underground. These wires enter a fusebox where a number of fuses protect the circuits and appliances inside the house. A fuse is simply a wire that overheats and melts if too much electricity passes through it.

● 'Ring' main

Several circuits branch out from the fusebox. One type powers the ceiling and wall lights. Another is the main 'ring' circuit that runs around the house, between the walls and under the floorboards. Each circuit consists of a live wire and a neutral wire - which are both connected to the sub-

A new generation of superconducting materials were discovered in 1987. This is a computer model of the molecular structure of one of them - yttrium-barium-copper oxide.

station - and an earth wire that conducts current harmlessly to the ground if an appliance fails.

The amount of current entering the house is measured by a meter. This contains a small motor, connected to a counter, that runs faster as more electricity is consumed. The meter clocks up the amount of electricity used and the reading is then used to determine the amount of a household's electricity bill.

Even the best conductor offers some resistance to a current and so

Power stations transmit electricity at very high voltages, which is stepped down later for safe domestic use. High voltages cut transmission losses, but huge

enough to be produced in a laboratory.

These new materials could have hope of practical applications. Superconductors in the future might be in a national grid, use might be in a national grid, from superconducting power lines would not lose energy during transmission. A lot of the new superconductors be in building an extremely fast computer.

Just amazing!

SHOCKING CURE

A SERIES OF RAPID, 25,000-VOLT SHOCKS. IT HAS BEEN FOUND TO BE AN EXCELLENT CURE FOR THE BITE OF DEADLY SNAKES SUCH AS THE SOUTH AFRICAN KILLER SNAKE.



HI-TECH MINES



POWER STATIONS



POLLUTION

KING COAL

Spectrum Colour Library

COAL SUPPLIES A HUGE SLICE of our energy needs, despite its reputation for being a dirty fuel and dangerous to extract. But the image of coal is changing. New technology is revolutionizing mines, while coal-burning is becoming cleaner and more efficient.

Most of the world's coal supplies started to form during the Carboniferous Period, from 360 to 280 million years ago. Decomposed plant matter in a moist environment, such as a swamp, broke down into peat. Buried underground, squeezed and heated, the peat gradually turned into coal, first into lignite, or brown coal, then (as the pressure and heat from above increased) into common bituminous coal, and finally into shiny black anthracite. A layer of peat around 5 metres thick will compress into a seam of coal some 30 cm deep.

As coal seams formed, the pressure forced out oxygen and hydrogen from the plant remains, leaving mainly carbon. Wood contains 50 per cent carbon, while lignite has 70 per cent

and anthracite 94 per cent. It is the carbon that burns, helped by pockets of trapped oxygen and hydrogen gas.

Coal is mined by two distinct methods: surface mining and underground operations. In surface mining – also known as opencast or strip mining – the layers above the coal seams (the

overburden) are stripped away. The overburden can be more than 100 metres deep. The biggest surface mines produce just under 50,000 tonnes of coal a day.

The majority of the world's coal, however, is brought up from underground, from seams as deep as 1,200

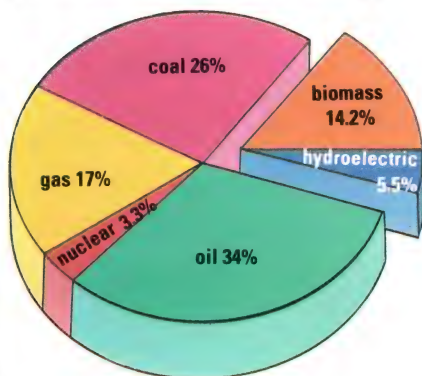
An opencast mine in Germany.

The sides of a surface mine are cut away to form a series of steps called benches. So the deeper the hole, the wider the area it must cover. Much coal, however, is mined underground. This coal face (right), in a mine in Kentucky, USA, is sliced with vertical strokes by a series of cutting edges mounted on a drum.

Costain Group



World Consumption of Energy



Mark Franklin

Coal, oil, gas and uranium will all eventually become uneconomic to mine. The top two renewable sources are heat from burning organic matter (biomass) and hydroelectricity.



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metres below the surface. Geological surveys provide data on which are the most promising seams and how they are laid out. In the most up-to-date mines, cutting machines are steered from a computer console in an underground operations room.

As the excavation proceeds, electronic guiders on the cutter transmit

signals back to the console giving the machine's exact position. Sensors around the mine also warn the control-room of that most feared danger – a potentially explosive build-up of methane gas. Other sensors monitor the quality of coal being extracted and tell if equipment needs replacing.

Electricity

The great majority of coal that comes out of the ground is consumed in power stations for making electricity. About 50 per cent of the UK's electrical energy, for example, is supplied by burning coal.

At a power plant, the coal is first pulverized into fine pieces so that it will burn more efficiently. The burning itself takes place in a huge, box-shaped boiler. The inner walls of the boiler contain tubes in which water is converted into steam. The steam passes through a superheater, where its temperature and pressure are in-

Heilbronn power station, run by operators manning computers in a central control room (below), is one of most modern coal-fired power stations in Germany, and one of the largest in the world to have a complete flue-gas cleaning programme.



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creased, before it drives a high-pressure turbine. A shaft from the turbine turns a generator that produces electrical current. A typical boiler consumes 500 tonnes of finely ground coal an hour – enough to generate a million kilowatt-hours of electricity.

Reducing pollution

Burning coal creates a number of problems, however. It contributes to the global 'greenhouse effect' by producing large amounts of carbon dioxide. It also gives off a number of poisonous substances, the worst of which is sulphur dioxide. When sulphur dioxide mixes with water droplets in the air, acid rain forms. This

BURIED IN PEAT



Trustees of the British Museum

As vegetable matter is compressed beneath the living surface of a bog it gradually turns into thick, black peat. Dried and cut into bricks, peat was once used to insulate cottages and it is still burned as fuel in many parts of the world. It is also an amazingly good preservative of animal and human remains. In 1985, for instance, the skin-covered head and upper torso of a man (above) was dug up from a peat-bog near Wilmslow in Cheshire, UK. Analysis showed that he had been garrotted – strangled with a twisted cord – around 2,000 years ago.

has killed millions of trees across Europe and North America.

To reduce their environmental impact, coal-fired power stations are being equipped with a variety of pollution-control systems. The most important of these is a flue-gas-desul-

Gypsum is a by-product of the coal burning process at Heilbronn, produced when limestone slurry combines with the sulphur in waste gas. Pressed into briquettes, it is sold as a building material.



phurization system called a scrubber. An alkaline substance, usually lime or limestone, is mixed with water and sprayed on to waste gas coming up the flue. The sulphur dioxide combines with this slurry to form calcium sulphate, or gypsum. In another process, in which crushed coal and limestone are suspended in a blast of air while they are burning, the limestone captures 90 per cent of the polluting gases given off.

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Just amazing!

THAT COAL BLACK MAGIC ...

AMONG SOME OF THE MORE SURPRISING PRODUCTS MADE USING COAL ARE NYLON, SACCHARINE SWEETENER, MOTHBALLS, WEEDKILLER AND ANTISEPTICS.



Paul Raymond

HIDDEN

RICHES

SOME OF THE DESERT areas of the world contain very rich mineral deposits. And in the Middle East, in particular, there are huge underground reservoirs of oil – a vital commodity for the economy of the world.

Four methods are used in finding sites to test drill for oil: surface feature mapping; seismographic observations; Earth gravity surveys and satellite sensing. The most obvious way is to look for signs on the surface such as tar sands or oil films on water in streams. A salt dome – bulging slightly in otherwise flat ground – is a good place to look as it is also a sign of an oil trap.

Satellite surveys

Remote sensing from satellites can speed up mapping and exploration. They show features that are invisible to the geologist in the field and cover vast areas. An important satellite for surveying is the Landsat Thematic Mapper. This takes pictures at wavelengths that are not normally visible. From these it is possible to tell apart common rock types and also detect potentially valuable formations. It shows up geological features, such as folds or faults. These features can ease the passage of fluids that concentrate metals and hydrocarbons.

Tony Stone Photo Library, London



Pipelines (above) transport crude oil from wells to ports for shipping, or to refineries (below), which process petroleum into different oil products.

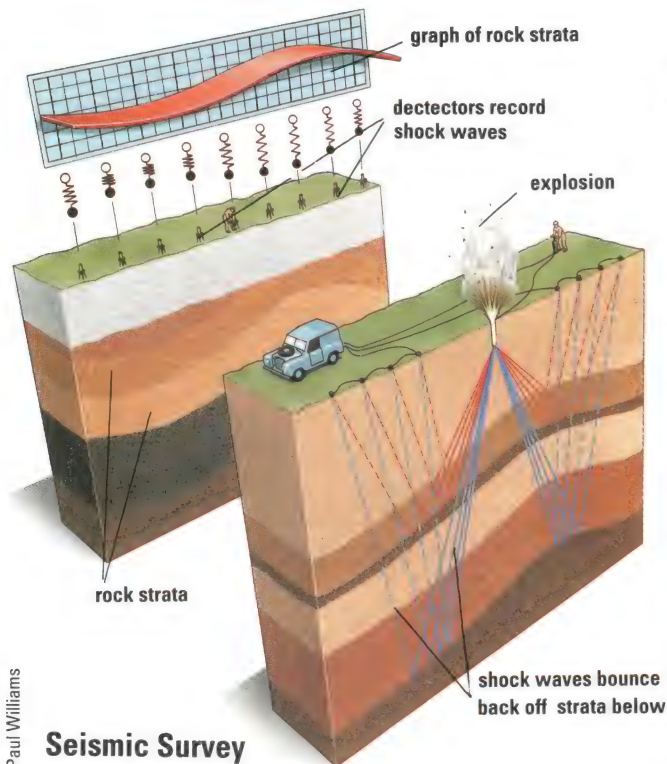
But as most subsurface folds and faults do not show their surfaces on the surface, geologists have to detect them by other methods. The first of these is likely to be the gravity survey. Although the excitation due to gravity at the Earth's surface is relatively constant, it changes fractionally where there are lighter or lighter rocks close to the surface.

Sound waves

Salt domes can be ticked out because salt is lighter than many other rocks and the gravity survey usually carried out from the air picks up a lessening of the gravitational field. Gravity surveys can also spot fault blocks and gas-chamber traps, but likely wells for oil accumulation.

When the geophysicist has picked up some likely spots, the geologist makes in to do more detailed seismic surveys. Different rocks transmit sound waves at different speeds and where two types of rock meet, some waves are reflected. So by sending a





Paul Williams

Seismic Survey

powerful vibration through rock, a picture of the features below can be built up, rather like a sonar or echo sounder at sea sees underwater features.

Finally, if the survey shows that there might be oil-bearing formations below, it is time to drill a test borehole. The familiar derrick with its rotating drill pipe tipped by the drill bit can bore as deep as 7,500 metres. Mud is pumped into the drill pipe hole to pre-

An open-cast diamond mine in South Africa is being converted to deep mining. Although more expensive, underground mines are worthwhile for valuable minerals such as diamonds.

To build up a graphic picture of the subsurface, geologists record the shock waves generated by explosions and analyse their speed with computers.

Mining for salt in the Niger. Rock salt can be found even in land-locked countries, where the mineral was deposited millions of years ago by seas that have now evaporated.

cells, focused by mirrors in a solar furnace and used to heat water or air in solar panels. It also has the power, combined with the dry air, to quickly evaporate water from a mineral-bearing mixture, leaving behind pure crystals. One example of this is the potash mine near Moab, Utah, USA.

Evaporation ponds

Water from the Colorado River is pumped down to the ore deposits over 900 metres below the surface. The ore dissolves in the water and the mix is brought back to the surface and stored in large, shallow evaporation ponds. After 12 months, pure potash crystals are left, for use in fertilizers, glass and soap.

One of most hellish mines on Earth was created by evaporation. In an

Dave Brincombe/Hutchison Library



'Christmas tree' valve to regulate the flow and allow apparatus to be lowered for repairs and assessment.

There are many other ores and minerals including gemstones extracted from desert or arid areas. These include the diamond mines of Namibia in southern Africa and those at Kimberley in

area of north-eastern Ethiopia, called the Danakil Depression, the bed of Lake Assale is all that remains of a cut off and evaporated branch of the Red Sea. In temperatures regularly up to and over 50°C, miners lever huge slabs of salt from the lake bed, which are cut into bricks and taken by camel train to market.

De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd

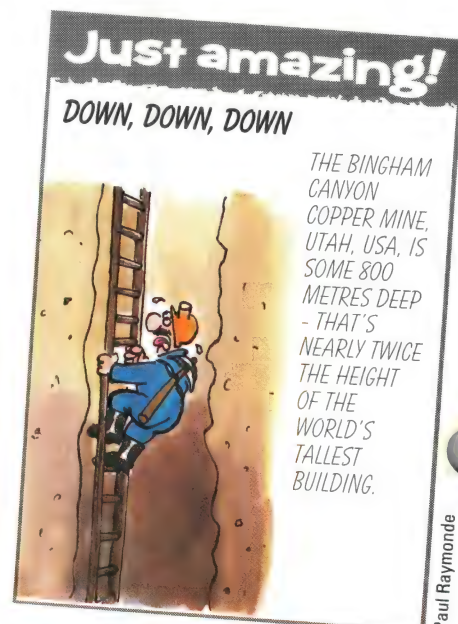


vent unwanted fluids flowing into the hole and to carry rock samples and other fragments back to the surface.

If the reservoir is economically viable, a pipe slightly thinner than the borehole is sent down and cement is forced into the gap between the hole and this pipe. This seals the borehole from the oil so the casing has to be blown open by explosives, allowing the oil to enter the pipe. When the oil starts to flow or is pumped to the surface, the well is topped with a

Western Australia, estimated to contain one third of the world's natural diamond supplies; the town of Mount Isa in Australia where copper, lead, zinc and silver are mined; and the iron ore fields and mines at Zouerate in northern Mauritania in the Sahara.

There is plenty of sunshine in the deserts and there is also, usually, plenty of salt. These resources can be exploited separately and together. Sunlight can be converted into electrical current using semiconductor solar



Paul Raymond

Interim Index (1)

This index is in alphabetical order. The six subject areas are keyed as follows: SF – SPACE FRONTIERS, NT – NEW TECHNOLOGY, F – FUTURES, PE – PLANET EARTH, ER – ENERGY AND RESOURCES, LW – LIVING WORLD. Complete articles are marked **bold**. So LW 77–80 is LIVING WORLD pages 77–80. File your index at the back of your binder for easy reference.

- A**
acid rain ER 9, ER 12
ageing LW 77–80
agriculture LW 24
salt water crops ER 62
air traffic control NT 71–72
aircraft
carriers NT 3
counter attack NT 45–48
design F 33–34
fighting NT 37–38, NT 39–42
spy-craft NT 41
Stealth NT 39, NT 48
airports LW 14, NT 71–74
airships LW 15–18
aliens SF 13–14
alkaloid, plant chemical NT 107
ammonites PE 66
animal,
breeding F 63–64
camouflage LW 32
cloning F 28–29
courtship rituals LW 72
diets LW 33–34
hibernation LW 75
homes LW 43–44
kingdoms LW 17–20
language LW 7–8
life expectancy LW 77, LW 78
medical testing on ER 48
power of LW 41–42
prehistoric PE 6, PE 14
racing LW 35–36
slaughter NT 5
answering machines F 12
ants LW 8, LW 17–18
jungle LW 64
aquaculture NT 55
aqualung F 1, F 2
arsenic LW 11
artificial insemination *see* insemination, artificial
astronaut,
problems in space SF 16
training as LW 5–6
astrostructures SF 19–20
athletes, diet ER 31
Atlantis, Lost City of PE 4
atomic reactors PE 69
atoms, anatomy of ER 21–22, PE 63–64
autism NT 86
avalanche PE 20–21
aviation technology, F 31–32 *see also* aircraft
- B**
babies, test tube NT 34, F 62–63
bacteria F 40, LW 81–82
ballistics NT 25–26
balloons ER 15–18
banknotes, production of ER 51–52
bell, diving F 2
Bermuda Triangle LW 1, PE 4
bicycles ER 37–40
Big Bang, the SF 25–28
biochip F 30
biogas ER 35, ER 36
bioluminescence LW 56
bionic man F 30
biorhythms LW 75
biotechnology NT 109–110
birds,
ability to fly LW 25–28
as disease carriers LW 16
migration LW 75
birth LW 71
black hole SF 10, SF 28
blizzards PE 28
blood, classifying F 21
body building ER 29–32
Bohr, Neils LW 48
bombs,
atomic ER 22
disposal F 17–18
hydrogen ER 22
neutron NT 51
boxing ER 32
brain,
chemical imbalances of NT 83–86
developing LW 45–47
electronic F 49–52
structure ER 45–48
washing NT 87–88
waves ER 46
bridges PE 43–46
buildings,
famous world NT 80
futuristic F 23–26
materials for ER 41–44
bullets,
gun NT 25–26
identification of NT 26
rubber F 16
buses NT 28
- C**
cable cars NT 29, NT 30
cameras NT 115–116
cannabis PE 7–8
canoeing PE 25
carbohydrates ER 24–25
carbon dating PE 67–68
cards,
credit F 53–56
telephone F 55–56
cargo carriers PE 37–40
cars,
computers in F 51
futuristic F 28, F 45–47
made by robots F 28
cash dispensers F 53–55
cassette players NT 18
cell PE 62
fusion F 40
reproduction LW 65–68
chemotherapy NT 108
Chomsky, Noam LW 48
chromosome PE 62
cities, archaeology F 24–25
cities,
deep seas F 4
dome F 25–26
transport in NT 27–30
clairvoyance PE 49
clocks NT 113–114
atomic NT 114
biological LW 73–76
radioactivity PE 67
clones, F 28, NT 33–36
animal NT 111–112
plant F 40, NT 109–110
cloud, formation and type PE 33–36, ER 63
cobalt ER 2
cocaine PE 7–8
communication,
between animals LW 7–8
electronic mail F 9–10
facsimile F 10, F 14
satellite SF 11–12, F 14
compact discs NT 18–19
computer F 49–52
fraud NT 21–22
hacking NT 21
conception LW 71
conservation ER 9–12
construction machinery NT 81–82
container transport PE 38, PE 39
continental shelf PE 1
copper ER 2
electrolytic PE 53
covalent bonding, atom PE 63–64
crab, fiddler LW 74, LW 75
cranes LW 75
criminals, methods of identifying F 19–22
crossbow NT 43–44
cryobiology NT 35
curare, plant chemical NT 108
cyclone PE 3, PE 27
- D**
dams PE 41, F 67
beaver LW 44
in tropical rain forests NT 105–106
data storage F 57–58
decompression sickness (bends) F 2
dehydration PE 16
dental identification F 21
deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) F 22, NT 111–112, PE 11–12, PE 61–62
desalination ER 61–62
desert,
rainfall in ER 64
reclaiming F 40
surviving in PE 18
detectors, X-ray F 8
diet,
animal LW 33–34
athletes ER 31
custom and cultures ER 25
dinosaurs PE 6, PE 14
diseases,
carried by pests LW 16
water-borne LW 81–82
diving F 1–4
DNA *see* deoxyribonucleic acid
dolphins NT 2, LW 7, LW 8, LW 47
drugs PE 7–8
fertility F 62
natural NT 84–86
production of, by DNA technology NT 111
NT 107–108
drying, food preservation NT 58
dune buggie ER 40
dykes PE 42
- E**
Earth,
creation of PE 11–12, SF 25–28
dating of PE 65–68
formation of PE 5–6
earthquake PE 2
earthworm LW 34
Einstein, Albert SF 27, LW 48, ER 56, F 65
electricity ER 6–8, ER 34
electro convulsive therapy (ECT) NT 85
electro-magnetic fields, in man F 30
electronic,
brain F 49
mail F 9–10
printing NT 16
electrons PE 63–64
elephants LW 17, LW 19, LW 41–42, NT 104
embryo,
flushing F 63–64
implantation in animals F 64
encephalins NT 84
endorphins NT 84
energy sources ER 5–8
alternative ER 8
erosion ER 11
water F 70
evolution PE 13–14, LW 21–24
exercise equipment NT 59–60
extra-sensory perception (ESP) PE 49
eyes LW 53–56
insect LW 54–55
signals LW 71
- F**
facsimile F 10, F 14
faith healing PE 49
farming,
intensive NT 53–56
in tropical rain forests ER 59–60
fats ER 23–24
fax machine, *see* Facsimile
ferries NT 6, PE 38–40
fingerprinting F 20–22
genetic F 22
fire, hazard in skyscrapers NT 79
fish,
evolution of PE 13–14
farming NT 55
killer LW 29
varieties of LW 3
fleas, water LW 82
flight recorder F 32
flying machines, nature's LW 25–28
fog PE 36
food,
additives ER 28
colouring ER 28
for energy ER 23–26
preservation NT 57–58
production ER 27–28
synthetic F 39–40
footwear, running shoes NT 59
forest,
clearance of ER 10–11
tropical rain ER 9, F 44, LW 59–60, PE 59, LW 64
dams NT 105–106
drugs and medicine produced from plants NT 107–108
exploration of PE 55–58
factories in NT 103–106
farming ER 59–60
greenhouse effect PE 59–60
plant genetic engineering F 59–60
rainfall in ER 64
vegetation LW 61–62
wildlife in LW 63–64
fossils PE 66
fraud NT 21–22
freezing, food NT 58
fuel,
alternatives ER 36
futuristic ER 35–36
- G**
galaxies PE 5–6
formation of SF 28
whirlpool SF 9
gas ER 5–7
gene,
bank F 59–60
mutation PE 62
genetic,
codes PE 61–62
disease PE 62
engineering, human NT 33–34, F 59–60, NT 111–113
plant NT 110
fingerprinting F 22
geological eras PE 13
glaciers, formation of PE 71
gliders ER 17, PE 21
gold ER 2, PE 54
mining PE 51–52
gramophone records NT 17–18
gold and silver PE 53
Grand Canyon PE 67
gravity, effect on bones LW 5
greenhouse effect ER 11, F 44, PE 59–60
Greenwich Mean Time NT 114
guns NT 25–26
beam NT 10
varieties of NT 26
- H**
hail,
formation of PE 29–30, ER 64
stones PE 35, ER 65
half-life PE 67–68
hang gliding ER 17, PE 21
hashish PE 8
Hawking, Stephen LW 48
hearing, animal LW 8
heart, effect of exercise on ER 32
helicopter ER 19–20, NT 74
attack NT 47
laser equipped NT 97
heroin PE 8
hibernation LW 75
hijacks LW 13–14
hormones LW 69–71
horse LW 41
breeding LW 35–36
houseflies LW 15, LW 16
houses,
built underground F 24
dome F 25
hovercraft ER 40
human,
ageing process LW 77–80
biological clock LW 75–76
freezing after death LW 79
moods LW 39–40
oldest living LW 78
hurricane PE 3, PE 4, PE 27
Huygens, Christopher ER 55
hydroelectric plants F 67–70
hydrogen power F 70
hydrotherapy PE 74
hypnotism PE 50
hypothermia NT 66
- IJK**
ice age LW 24
icebergs, formation of PE 71–72
infertility F 61–62
information storage F 57–58
insects,
eyes LW 54–55
flying LW 27–28
insemination, artificial, animal (AI) F 63–64
human NT 33–34, F 61–62
intelligence, child LW 49–50
interrogation techniques NT 87–88
Io, Jupiter's moon SF 4
ions LW 40, NT 83
irradiation NT 58
irrigation,
artificial ER 66
schemes PE 10
Jacuzzi PE 74–75
jellyfish LW 19, LW 56
jetlag LW 76
juggernaut *see* trucks, articulated
jungle *see* forest, tropical rain
Jupiter, planet SF 3, SF 4
karate ER 32
kidney NT 118
knee joint LW 38
- L**
language, animal LW 7–8
laser NT 95–98
surgery NT 35
therapy LW 38
weapons NT 9, NT 10, NT 98
life, creation of PE 11–12
lifeboats NT 5–6
lifespan *see* ageing
light,
speed of ER 58, F 65–66
understanding ER 55–58
years PE 6
lightning PE 29–30
locks PE 42
locust LW 27
longbow NT 43–44
lunar cycles LW 73
- M**
magnesium ER 2
mail, electronic F 9–10
mammals, flying LW 28
man,
ages of PE 13
bionic F 30 *see also* human
manganese ER 1
marijuana PE 8
Mars,
exploration vehicle ER 40
first landing SF 7–8
life on SF 5–8
missions to SF 6
medicines, production of NT 107–108
menstruation LW 71
mental handicaps NT 85–86
mesons F 66
metals, precious ER 2, PE 51–54
mice LW 16
microfilm F 58
microphones NT 12
microwave energy ER 8
microwaves ER 57

migration, bird LW 75
 Milky Way PE 6
 mind over matter PE 49–50
 minerals ER 25
 salts ER 66
 underwater ER 1
 Miranda, Uranus's moon SF 4
 mirrors ER 57–58
 missiles NT 2, NT 38
 anti-aircraft NT 47–48
 ballistic NT 51
 nuclear NT 50
 molecular chains PE 63–64
 money,
 production of ER 49–52
 smart F 53–56
 monkeys, jungle LW 63
 moods, human LW 39–40
 Moon,
 base SF 20
 colony SF 2
 exploration vehicle ER 40
 shot SF 1–2
 motor racing NT 61–64
 mountaineering PE 19–20
 mountains, undersea PE 1, PE 2
 murder LW 9–12
 muscle power ER 30–31

N
 nature, man against PE 19–22
 navigation, satellite F 6, SF 11, NT 42
 Nebula, Orion F 7
 Neptune, planet SF 3, SF 4
 Nereid, Neptune's moon SF 4
 nerve cell *see* neuron
 nervous system ER 45–48
 neurotransmitters NT 83–84
 neuron ER 45, NT 83–84
 neutrons PE 63–64
 Newton, Sir Isaac ER 55
 nickel ore ER 2, PE 53–54
 nitrogen narcosis (narcs) F 2–3
 nuclear,
 power stations ER 7
 war F 37–38
 weapons ER 22, NT 49–52

O
 obesity ER 27
 ocean,
 divers F 1–4
 formation of PE 1–2
 life LW 3–4
 pollution of ER 4
 rescue and survival NT 5–6
 resources ER 1–4
 oil ER 53–54
 offshore ER 1, ER 2
 pollution ER 4
 rigs PE 47
 world production ER 36
 optical,
 discs F 58
 illusions LW 57–58
 orchids LW 61–62
 Orion Nebula F 7
 oysters ER 2
 ozone layer ER 10, ER 35, F 43–44

P
 Pangaea PE 1
 parachuting PE 21
 parasites LW 15–16
 pasteurization NT 58
 Pauling, Linus LW 48
 pearls ER 2
 pelicans LW 18–19
 pest, control NT 53–54
 pheromones LW 69
 Phobos, Mars' moon SF 7–8
 photo-finish NT 60
 photocopying machines NT 16
 photofit F 20
 photography NT 115–116
 photovoltaics ER 34
 phytoplankton LW 82
 Piaget, Jean LW 48
 pictures,
 moving NT 99–102
 still 115–116

pigeon LW 16, LW 28, LW 36
 pitcher plant, carnivorous LW 31, 61, 62
 planets, outer SF 3–4
 plankton LW 82
 plant,
 cloning NT 34, F 40
 killer LW 31
 oldest living LW 77
 production of drugs and medicine from NT 107–108
 propagation LW 67, NT 109–110
 protein F 39–41 in tropical rain forests LW 61–62
 plate tectonics PE 1–2
 Plimsoll mark PE 38
 Pluto, planet SF 3, SF 4
 poisons LW 11
 poles, magnetic PE 68
 police, use of computers NT 23–24
 pollution,
 air ER 5
 lead ER 35–36
 oil ER 4
 sea ER 4
 polyploidy NT 110
 polyps LW 19
 polywater PE 72
 population,
 future F 28–29
 world PE 9–10, LW 24
 potholing PE 21
 pottery, dating history by PE 68
 power,
 alternative sources ER 8
 electricity ER 6–8
 gas ER 5–7
 hydrogen F 70
 natural ER 33–34
 sources of ER 5–8
 water F 67–70
 precognition PE 49
 predators LW 29–32
 pregnancy,
 alcohol abuse during NT 86
 viral infections during LW 47
 preservation, food NT 57–58
 printing methods NT 15–16
 propagation, vegetative LW 67
 protein ER 23
 sources F 39–40
 protons PE 63–64
 protozoans LW 82
 psycho-kinesis PE 49
 pulsars, dead stars F 7

Q
 quicksand F 67
 quinine NT 108

R
 racing,
 animal LW 35–36
 motor NT 61–64
 radiation, in space SF 16
 radio,
 broadcasting NT 11–12
 telephones F 13
 telescopes F 8, SF 14, SF 21
 waves ER 57
 radioactivity PE 67
 dating NT 22, PE 67–68
 rain, PE 35
 acid ER 9, ER 12
 tropical ER 64
 rainbows PE 35
 rats LW 15–16
 reefs, coral PE 2, LW 19
 reflex actions ER 46, ER 47–48
 relative dating PE 66
 replacement surgery NT 35, NT 36
 reproduction,
 by artificial means F 61–64
 cell LW 65–68
 human LW 69–71
 reptiles, killer LW 30
 riots,
 control of F 15–16
 effect of hot weather LW 40

river, formation of ER 65
 robots F 27–30
 space SF 19–20
 surgery by NT 86
 underwater F 3
 rock, creation and dating of PE 65–68
 rowing PE 26
 rubber industry NT 105
 Russell, Bertrand LW 48

S
 salt, depletion ER 62
 sandstorms PE 29
 saprophyte plants LW 62
 satellite SF 23, SF 24
 communication SF 11–12
 military SF 17–18
 spy F 5–6, NT 9–10
 weather F 5–6, NT 68, NT 69–70
 Saturn, planet SF 3, SF 4
 schizophrenia NT 86
 scorpions LW 31
 sea PE 3–4
 constructions in PE 47–48
 creatures LW 3–4
 pollution of ER 4
 rescue and survival NT 5–6
 seaweed ER 3, PE 18
 semisubmersible PE 40
 sewage NT 31–32, LW 82
 works NT 118
 sharks LW 1–2
 silver ER 2
 mining PE 52–53
 records, PE 53
 simulators,
 engineering F 33–34
 flight F 34
 skiing PE 20–21
 water PE 25
 skyscrapers NT 77–80
 construction of NT 81–82
 slaughter NT 56
 slot machines NT 93–94
 snakes,
 constrictors LW 30–31
 jungle LW 64
 snow PE 29–30, PE 35
 formation of ER 64
 snowmobiles ER 40
 solar energy, F 24, ER 34
 greenhouse cultivation F 39
 solar system PE 5, PE 6
 soldiers, survival techniques PE 15–18
 sonar detection NT 2, PE 72
 Space PE 5
 junk in SF 12
 living in SF 15–16
 pulsars F 7
 robots SF 19–20
 surviving in LW 5–6
 spacecraft,
 shuttle NT 7–8
 Viking SF 6
 Voyager SF 4
 sperm banks F 28
 spiders, LW 31
 jungle LW 64
 webs LW 44
 spine,
 spinal cord ER 47
 spinal nerves ER 46
 sports,
 exercise equipment NT 59–60
 injuries LW 37–38
 water PE 23–26 *see also*
 under individual sport
 spout, water PE 3, PE 4, PE 30
 springs, hot PE 74
 spy, satellites F 5–6, NT 9–10
 squid LW 56
 star wars NT 9–10, SF 18
 stars,
 black hole SF 10
 exploding SF 9
 formation of SF 23–24, SF 28
 steroid, abuse LW 38
 stock exchange NT 89–92
 storm surge PE 4
 submarines,
 flying NT 3
 nuclear NT 4
 submersibles, F 3–4
 supermarkets F 41–42

surfing PE 23–24
 surgery,
 by robot NT 86
 implanting biochips F 30
 laser NT 35
 transplant NT 35, 36
 survival techniques PE 15–18
 swimming PE 23, 73, PE 75
 synapse NT 85
 syntax F 51–52
 synthesizers F 52

T
 tank, armaments NT 45–47
 tankers, oil PE 38, PE 40
 tape recorders NT 18
 telepathy PE 49
 telephones F 11–14
 telescopes F 7–8, SF 22
 radio F 8, SF 14, SF 21
 teletext NT 14
 television,
 satellite NT 11–12, NT 13–14
 transmission NT 12–14
 telex machines F 10
 termite towers LW 44
 thermoluminescence PE 68
 thunder PE 29–30
 timber, from tropical rain forests NT 103–106
 time,
 beginning of SF 25–28
 measurement of NT 113–114
 standard NT 114
 travel through F 65–66
 Titan, Saturn satellite SF 4
 Titanic, exploring F 3
 tornadoes PE 28–29
 trains,
 futuristic F 47–48
 maglav NT 30
 overhead track NT 28
 underground systems NT 28–30
 trams NT 28
 transpiration ER 64
 transplant surgery NT 35, NT 36
 transport, in cities NT 27–30
 travel, futuristic NT 29, F 45–48
 tree, dating PE 68
 tremor, earth PE 2
 tribal rites PE 58
 Triton, Neptune's moon SF 4
 trolleybuses NT 28
 tropical rain forest, *see* forest
 truck, articulated NT 75–76
 tsunamis PE 3, PE 4
 tunnels PE 43–44
 turbines, reaction and impulse F 67–70
 Turing, Alan LW 48
 typhoon PE 3, PE 27

UV
 ultra-sound LW 38
 universe
 creation of SF 25–28
 end of SF 28
 uranium ER 2
 Uranus, planet SF 3, 4
 vehicles,
 armoured F 16
 rough terrain ER 40
 video,
 cameras NT 19–20
 discs NT 19
 interactive NT 20
 recorders NT 19–20
 videofit F 20–21
 videophone F 14

viewdata F 10
 viper fish LW 56
 vision LW 53–56 *see also* eyes
 vitamins ER 24, ER 25
 volcano,
 eruption of PE 1
 islands PE 2
 on Mars SF 7

W
 war, nuclear F 37–38
 warfare,
 aerial NT 37–38
 air counter attack NT 45–48
 biological F 36
 chemical F 35–36
 economic F 36
 naval NT 1–4
 nerve gases F 36
 wars, star NT 9–10, SF 18
 warships NT 4
 water PE 25
 barriers PE 41–42
 composition of PE 69
 contraction and expansion of PE 69–70
 cycle of ER 63–66
 desalination ER 61–62
 diviner/dowser PE 50
 domestic consumption NT 31
 erosion F 70
 groundwater ER 65
 microscopic life in LW 81–82
 pollution NT 117
 power F 67–70
 purification NT 32
 sound under PE 72
 sports PE 23–26
 spout PE 3, PE 4
 table ER 65
 works NT 117–118
 waves PE 3
 weapons,
 at sea NT 1–4
 guns, beam NT 10, SF 18
 laser NT 9, NT 10
 nuclear 22, NT 49–52
 weather,
 Beaufort scale PE 29
 buoys NT 70
 coping with cold NT 65–66
 effect on moods LW 39–40
 elements of PE 33–36
 forecasting, effect on airlines F 34, NT 67–70
 fronts PE 33–36
 hazards PE 27–30
 manipulating F 43–44
 satellites F 5–6, NT 68, NT 69–70
 understanding PE 31–32
 weightlessness, in space LW 5
 whales LW 8
 wildlife, in tropical rain forests LW 63–64
 willy-willies PE 27
 wind PE 3
 effect on skyscrapers NT 78
 farms ER 33, ER 34
 power ER 34
 skating ER 17
 surfing PE 24–25
 worms LW 66–67, LW 74
 palolo ER 2

XYZ
 X-ray detectors F 8
 zebras LW 17
 zinc ore PE 53
 zooplankton LW 82

Interim Index (2)

This index is in alphabetical order. The six subject areas are keyed as follows: SF - SPACE FRONTIERS, NT - NEW TECHNOLOGY, F - FUTURES, PE - PLANET EARTH, ER - ENERGY AND RESOURCES, LW - LIVING WORLD. Complete articles are marked **bold**. So LW 77-80 is LIVING WORLD pages 77-80. File your index at the back of your binder for easy reference.

A
acid rain PE 152
acrylic NT 270
acupuncture ER 74
adrenalin LW 83
agriculture SF **29-30**
AIDS LW 95
aikido LW 84
air speed record NT 187-188
aircraft NT **221-222**
aerobatic NT **227-230**
bombers NT **275-278**
carriers of NT 165, NT 226
escape from NT 209-211
fighting NT **223-226**
man-powered PE **133-135**
measuring speed of NT 184
safety NT 179-182
airports F **99-100**, NT 151-152
alcohol NT 182
Alexander principle ER 87
alien civilization SF **39-41**
aluminium ER 84, ER 98, ER 99-100, ER 122, NT 265
Amazon river PE 140
amusement parks NT **193-196**
anatomy, of female body LW 107
animal,
blubber LW 156
camouflage LW 100, PE 110
in captivity LW **129-132**
cells in LW 134
conservation LW 137
habitats of LW **113-114**
living underground LW **101-104**
poaching LW **135-137**
skin LW **155-158**
speeds of LW 110, LW 121-124
survival strategies LW 110-112, LW **119-120**, LW **159-162**, PE **109-110**
ant LW 112, LW 113, LW 120
Antarctic circle PE 140
anti-lock braking NT 179-180
antibiotics ER 73
antibodies LW 95
anxiety ER 90
aquaculture ER **69-72**
archery ER 117-118
Arctic circle PE 140
armadillo LW 103, LW 120
armoured vehicles NT 272-274
artillery NT **171-174**
asbestos ER 88, ER 124, PE 87-88
athletics LW **125-128**, LW **151-154**, PE **105-108**
atoms ER **123-126**, F 80, NT 265-266
autogyro NT 232
automation technology NT **205-208**

B
bacteria LW 93-94, LW 101-102, LW 115-116, NT 127, PE 86
ball speeds LW 127
barracuda LW 146
bat LW 101, LW 119, LW 142
bear LW 110, LW 155
bed bugs LW 118
bee LW 113-114, 141-142
beetle LW 109, LW 120
bends NT 163-164, NT 178,

Berlin Wall PE 94
bicycle,
racing ER **115-116**, LW 127, LW 128
safety NT 182
Big Bang PE 124
biological engineering NT 236
biotechnology F **75-76**
bird,
feathers LW 157
of prey ER 104, LW 110
shape of bills PE 110
blood LW 134
bloodsport LW **149-150**
blubber, animal LW 156
bobsleigh PE 147-148
body,
maintenance ER **85-87**
protectors ER 88
bomb NT 152, PE 120-121
defusing NT 272-273
nuclear ER **79-80**, F 86, PE 100
bombers NT **275-278**
bone, fractures ER 73
boxing ER 113-114
brain,
disorders of NT 133
power LW 107, LW 108, NT 143
scan NT 235
scanner NT 138
tumour NT 134
breakdown, nervous ER 90
bricks F 105
bridges, assembling
portable NT **259-260**
bullet, plastic NT 173
bullfighting LW 150
burglar alarm systems NT 153-154

C
cactus PE 110
camouflage,
animal LW 159-160
insect LW 159-161
in warfare PE 155-156
camping PE 113
cancer,
PE 86
therapy F 78
car,
braking distances NT 181
computerized systems
ER 75-77, 79-80, NT 184
construction NT **255-258**
manufacture F 97-98
racing NT **261-264**
recycling ER 97-98
safety design NT **179-182**
security systems NT 152-153
carbon ER 123
cardboard city PE 114
cat family LW 112
catalytic converter F 106
caves PE 97, PE 98-99, PE 139
cells, animal and human LW **133-134**
centrifugal force NT 193, NT 194
ceramics F **105-106**
cermets F 106
chameleon LW 111, LW 122-123
cheetah LW 109, 121
Chernobyl ER 80, ER 125, NT 214, PE 88
chess NT 143
chicken, battery NT 125-127
chipmunk LW 103
chlorophyll LW 147
chromakey NT 123-124
circulatory system LW 105
clay-pigeon shooting ER 118

clothes manufacture F 98
coal, mining for ER 81-82
cockchafer PE 136
cockroach LW 104, LW 118
coffee NT 127
coma LW 108
combat, urban PE **153-154**
comet PE 124
composites NT 270
computer,
car manufacture and design ER 75-77, F 79-80, NT **179-182**
controlling homes F 89-90
crime NT **155-156**
design NT 207-208
fifth generation F **81-82**
games NT **189-192**
graphics NT **147-150**
hackers ER 112, NT 156, PE 91
language NT 145
medical diagnoses F 77-78
memory banks NT **145-146**
sabotage PE 89-92
software ER **111-112**
super F **79-80**
use in food production NT 127-128
virus NT 156, PE **89-92**
conductor, electricity NT 265
copper ER 81, ER 121, ER 122, NT 127
pyrites ER 126
coral LW 110-111, PE **141-144**
corrosion ER 122
cosmetic surgery NT 133
counter-insurgency operations NT 275-278
crab, cave LW 103, LW 111, LW 113, LW 141
cricket, camel LW 104
crocodile LW 109, LW 111, LW 120, LW 156
crops,
growing indoors NT **129-130**
growing under plastic NT 127
cuckoo LW 114
cuttlefish LW 111, 123

D
dams NT **251-254**
daredevils NT 196
data transmission PE 89
deafness, treating NT 135
deception techniques PE **155-158**
decibel LW 87
defence, self LW **83-84**
deforestation PE 152
dehydration PE 87
desert,
greening of PE **83-84**
vipers LW 104
design, computer-aided NT 207-208
diamond, mining for ER 82, ER 84
diet ER 85
digital vascular imaging (DVI) NT 139
disasters, natural PE **123-124**
discs,
compact F 72, F 74, NT 146
recording NT **119-122**
disease, carriers of LW 96
dolomite F 105
Doppler principle NT 184
drag racing NT 183, 186
dragon LW 139, LW 141, LW 142
dragonfly PE 136
drugs,
effect on athletes LW 128
smuggling PE 95
in sport PE 107
dry rot LW 116, LW 117
duck LW 123, LW 157, NT 127
dummy and decoy techniques PE 156-158
dust clouds SF 40-41
Dutch elm disease PE 152
dykes ER **107-110**
dysentery LW 95

E
eagle LW 109, LW 113, LW 138, PE 110
ear,
bionic NT 161
function of LW 106-108
Earth,
profile of PE **97-100**
rotation of PE 124
earthquake PE **101-104**, PE 117-118, PE 124
ejection seat NT 209, NT 210
electric, current NT 265-266
electricity generators NT 204
electron NT 265-266
electronic,
games NT **189-192**
tagging F 83-84
village PE **89-92**
elements ER 123
elephant LW 109, LW 123, LW 135-136, LW 158
embryo, transplanting cells from NT 133-134
emergency services NT **217-220**
endoscope NT 132, 139, 233-234
Eurotunnel NT 160
evolution PE 109-110
exercise ER 86-87
extra-sensory perception NT 238
eye,
disease NT 132
electronic NT 162
eye-dentification NT 274
surgery NT 132, NT 134, NT 135
F
falcon, peregrine LW 109, LW 121, LW 122
famine PE 81-82
farming,
factory NT 125-128
fish ER **69-72**
future F **75-76**
on the Moon SF **29-30**
organic NT 128
fibre optics PE 89-90
fire,
control systems NT 169-170
fighting NT **213-216**
firearms ER 118
fish ER **69-72**, LW 111, LW 146
flying PE 136
scales LW 158
fitness chart PE 106
flea LW 112
fly,
African tsetse LW 96
bluebottle LW 96
chironomid LW 109
horse LW 96
flying-machines PE **133-135**
food,
additives ER 95
allergy ER 86
football ER 112-113
industry ER **93-96**
fox PE 110, PE 136
hunting LW 149-150
fracture ER 73
frog LW 104, LW 112, LW 120, PE 110, PE 136
frostbite ER 102
fungi LW 93, LW 94, 116-117
fungicide LW 89
fur, animal LW 157-158

G
gamma rays ER 125
gazelle LW 109
Geiger counter ER 125
genetic fingerprinting NT 236
geothermal pools PE 139
gerbil PE 110
germ warfare LW **93-95**
germanium ER 121, NT 265
gerunuk PE 110
geyser PE 100, PE 140
ghosts NT **237-238**
giraffe PE 109
glands, sweat LW 156
glass,

bullet-proof NT 153
recycling ER 98
gliding ER **103-106**
global defence system SF **31-32**
glue NT 270
gold ER 81-82, ER 84, ER 122
gopher LW 102-103
gorilla LW 137, LW 138
grasshopper LW 104, LW 112
gravitational force NT 194
gravity ER 91-92
Great Wall of China PE 94-95
greenhouse effect F **101-102**
greenhouses LW 129
grenades NT 274
greyhound LW 109, LW 121, LW 124
guerrilla warfare PE **119-122**
guns NT **171-174**

H
hackers, computer ER 112, NT 156, PE 91
hair, animal LW 157-158
Halley's Comet SF 37
hang-gliding ER 105-106
hare, Arctic PE 110
healing processes ER **73-74**
health PE **85-88**
hearing LW **86-88**
heart,
surgery NT 135-136
transplant NT 134
heart and lung machine NT 140
hedgehog LW 104, LW 120
helicopter, gun ships NT **279-280**
helium ER 123
herbalism ER 74
herbicide LW 89
hermaphrodite LW 102
hibernation LW 98
hijacks PE 120
hippopotamus LW 119, LW 124, LW 158
hologram ER 122
homes,
computer controlled F 89-90
futuristic F **87-90**
keeping clean PE **115-116**
mobile PE **111-114**
underground F 88
withstanding natural disasters PE **117-118**
homoeopathy ER 74
hormones ER 90, NT 127
hot springs PE 139
human body ER **85-87**, LW **105-108**, NT **161-162**
hummingbird LW 122, PE 109
hurricane PE 117
hydroelectric power NT **251-254**
hydrogen ER 123
hydroponics NT 129-130
hydrotherapy ER 74
hypothermia ER 101-102, PE 87

IJK
igloo PE 114
image converter NT 184
imaging system F 78, NT 137-139
insect,
habitats LW 113
infestation in homes LW 118
insecticide LW 89
iron ER 81, ER 121, ER 123
iron oxide ER 126
isotopes ER 124-125
ivory LW 135-136
jellyfish LW 110-111, LW 120
jet-pack NT 230
joints, artificial F 106
jojoba F 76
judo LW 84
jungle exploration PE 139-140
kangaroo PE 100

karate LW 83-84
kelp ER 69
kidney machine NT 138, NT 139-140
kites ER 105
Kung Fu LW 84

L
land, reclaiming ER 107-110

laser,
beams ER 127-128
rangefinders NT 169
surgery NT 132-134
surgical gas NT 138, 139
treatment by NT 139
lead ER 122, 123
sulphide ER 126
telluride NT 265
leather LW 158
lemur LW 138, PE 110
leopard LW 110, 138
life,
boat NT 217-218
expectancy PE 87
jackets NT 211
support systems NT 137-140
lightning PE 118
lightship NT 241
limbs, artificial LW 106-107, NT 136, NT 161-162
limestone PE 138
lion LW 110, 112, 121
liquid crystal display (LCD) F 96
listeria NT 127
lizard LW 109, LW 141, LW 156, PE 136
lobster ER 71, LW 111
locust LW 91
louse, head PE 86

M
mantis shrimp LW 146
Mars SF 38
martial arts LW 83-84
mass assembly F 97-98
matter ER 123-126
meat, world consumption of PE 81
medical,
miracles NT 135-136
science NT 233-236
medicine,
alternative ER 73-74
computerized diagnoses F 77-78
use of isotopes and radioisotopes ER 125
memory banks NT 145-146
mercury ER 121-122, NT 266, PE 124
metals ER 121-122, F 106
see also under individual headings
microelectronics NT 140
microengineering F 103-104
microfungi LW 116-117
microlights NT 231-232
micromachines F 95-96
microphone NT 120
microscopes F 103-104, NT 234
microscopic lifeforms LW 115-118
microsurgery NT 133-134
midges LW 122
migration, bird ER 103-104
military engineer NT 259-260
mimicry LW 160-162, PE 110
mines and mining ER 81-84, ER 122, NT 177, PE 120
missiles F 91-94, NT 176, NT 225
mites, dust PE 115, 116
mole LW 102-103, 123
mole rat LW 114
monkey PE 110
Moon,
farming on SF 30
rock SF 30
mosquito LW 96
moths LW 110, LW 118
motion, laws of ER 91-92
motorbike racing LW 128
mountain,
exploration PE 137-138
rescue NT 219

movies, making monster NT 197-198
muscles LW 105-106, NT 235
music,
instrument LW 88, PE 77-80
making PE 77-80
making records NT 119-122

N
naked mole-rat LW 103
nanotechnology F 103-104
naturopathy ER 74
navigation systems ER 77-78, NT 239-242
nematocide LW 89
Neptune SF 35, 37
neutrons ER 124-125
Newton, Sir Isaac ER 91
nicotine, addiction PE 86-87
nomads PE 111-114
northern lights SF 41
nuclear reactor ER 123
nutrition PE 85-86
nylon NT 270

O
oak PE 151
ocean exploration PE 138-139
octopus LW 111, 122, 123, 140
office, pollutants PE 86
oil,
mining for ER 81, 82, NT 163
spills PE 131-132
oil rigs,
escape from NT 211
fire on NT 216
optical fibres F 82
orang-utan LW 137, LW 138
orange roughly ER 70
orchid PE 110
oryx LW 137
osprey LW 120
osteopathy ER 74
ostriches LW 124
otter hunting LW 150
oxygen ER 123
oysters ER 71

P
pacemakers NT 135
pacesetters LW 125-128
Pacific wolk LW 146
panda LW 138
paper,
making NT 203-204, PE 151
recycling ER 98
parachute display NT 230
parasites LW 93, LW 95
head louse PE 86
tapeworm PE 87
penicillin ER 73, LW 95, 117
Periodic Table ER 123
pest control LW 89-92
petroleum ER 125
phobias LW 142
phosphorus NT 265
photosynthesis LW 148, SF 30
plague LW 96
planetary systems SF 39-41
plant LW 147-148
cells LW 133
poaching LW 135
technology F 75
plastic ER 98, F 87, NT 267-270
Pluto PE 124, SF 35
plutonium ER 124
poaching LW 135-137
poisoning, food NT 127
pollination LW 148
pollution F 106, PE 131-132
chemical PE 88
coastal ER 70
industrial PE 88
sea ER 71
types of PE 85, PE 86
poltergeist NT 238
polyamides NT 270
polycarbonate NT 270
polystyrene NT 270
polythene NT 268, 270
porcupine LW 120

possum PE 109
potassium ER 122
prairie dog LW 102-103
protons ER 124-125
protozoa LW 93, 95
psychic powers NT 238
pulsars SF 41

QR
quartz crystal ER 84, 126
quicksand PE 139
rabies LW 96
radar NT 182, 276, PE 156-157
radiation F 77-78, PE 88
radio signals SF 40-41
radioactive waste PE 131
radioactivity PE 88
radioisotope ER 125
rain, acid PE 152
rat LW 96, LW 119
rectifier NT 265
recycling ER 97-100
reptile, flying PE 110
rhinoceros LW 111, 136-137, 158
ringworm LW 95
robotics NT 141-144
robots NT 205-207
rodents LW 96
roller coasters NT 193-195
rugby ER 112
rust ER 122

S
sailfish LW 121
salamander LW 112
salmon ER 69-72, LW 109
salmonella NT 127
satellite,
defence systems PE 90, SF 31-32
navigation by NT 239-242
spy NT 272
Saturn SF 36-37
scales, fish and animal LW 158
scanner NT 138
scorpion fish LW 146
scorpion LW 111
sea,
anemones LW 110-111
defences ER 110
rescue from NT 219
snake LW 146
security,
airport NT 151-152
devices NT 154
national PE 93-96
personal LW 83-84
technology of NT 151-154
seismology PE 98, PE 103
semiconductors NT 265-266
shark ER 69, LW 139-140, LW 146, LW 155, LW 156
ship,
escape from NT 210-211
wrecks NT 247-250
silicon NT 265-266
silver ER 84, ER 121-123
silverfish LW 116
simulators, flight NT 149-150
sine wave ER 67
skiing PE 145-148
skin PE 85
animal LW 155-158
artificial NT 162
function of LW 108
grafting NT 133, NT 134
structure of LW 106
skunk LW 112, LW 120
skydivers LW 128
sleep ER 87
sloth LW 123
smoke detector NT 216
smoking PE 86-87
snake LW 111-112, LW 140-141, LW 146, LW 158, PE 110
solar,
energy F 88, SF 29-30
power PE 84
system ER 91, NT 184, PE 124, SF 35-38
sonar sensors NT 177
sonic boom PE 124
sound ER 67-68
barrier ER 68
synthetic F 71-74

waves ER 67, ER 68
space,
factories in SF 43-44
probes SF 35-38
rescue from SF 33-34
Shuttle ER 91-92
Special Air Services (SAS) NT 274
speed,
air record NT 187-188
athletes' records LW 125-128
equating ER 91-92
land record NT 186
measurement of NT 183-184
records NT 185-188
water record NT 187
speedometer NT 184
spider,
LW 111, LW 104, LW 117, LW 140, LW 142
mite LW 91
sport,
blood LW 149-150
contact ER 111-114
squid LW 123, 140
stalactite PE 98, PE 99
stalagmite PE 99
staphylococcus aureus NT 127
star, formation ER 124
Star Wars F 94, SF 31-32
steel refining NT 201-202
steroids PE 107
stress ER 89-90
submarine NT 165-166, NT 175-178, NT 211-212
superconductors NT 266
supermen PE 105-108
supertankers NT 243-245
surgery NT 131-134
heart NT 135-136
plastic NT 134
surgical stapler NT 234
surveillance F 83-84
systems NT 271-274
survival,
animal LW 97-100
human ER 101-102
strategies LW 159-162
sweat glands LW 156
swift LW 109, 121
synthesizer F 71-74, NT 149, NT 150
voice NT 143-144

T
taekwondo LW 84
tank NT 167-170
tanning LW 158
tapeworm PE 87
target shooting ER 117-118
taste bud LW 106
teeth LW 119, PE 86
shark LW 155
telepathy NT 238
telephone,
networks F 90
systems PE 89
tapping F 84
telescopes SF 40
television, miniature F 95-96
termmites LW 113, LW 118
terrorism, counter NT 271-274
terrorists PE 119-122
theme parks PE 125-128
thermal,
camera NT 220
imaging NT 167
thermography NT 235-236
thermometer ER 122
thermoplastics NT 267-268
timber PE 149-152
toad LW 90, LW 112, LW 120
tornadoes PE 118
torpedoes NT 176

toys, hi-tech NT 199-200
train,
driverless ER 78
high-speed NT 187-188
tranquillizers ER 90
transistor NT 266
transplants NT 133-134
transportation,
computerized systems ER 75-78, NT 209-212
underground systems NT 157-160

tree,
coniferous PE 151
house PE 114
telling age of PE 68
Triton SF 35
truck, long distance NT 166
tsunami PE 102
tumour NT 133-134

UV
ultrasound ER 68, PE 115-116
underground home constructions F 87-90
unexplored territories PE 137-140
Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) SF 42
Uranus SF 37
urban combat PE 153-154
vaccination, cattle LW 92
vacuum cleaners PE 115
Venus F 102, SF 38
vibraphone NT 220
videophones F 90, PE 91
videos, pop NT 123-124
virus, computer NT 156, PE 89-92
viruses LW 93, LW 94, LW 115
vocal chords ER 68
volcanoes PE 98-100, PE 123-124
Voyager 1 and 2 NT 166, SF 35-38

W
Walkman F 95-96
warfare,
aerial NT 223-226
deception techniques PE 155-158
germ LW 93-95
guerrilla PE 119-122
urban combat PE 153-154
washing machines PE 115-116
water,
speed record NT 187
unpurified LW 95
weather, computerized forecasting F 79
whale LW 109-110, LW 137, LW 143-146
Wheelbarrow, bomb defuser NT 272
whiplash NT 182
winter sports LW 126-128
wood PE 149-152
woodpecker PE 110
woodworm LW 118
work, motivation PE 129-130
worm LW 102, LW 104, LW 120
wrestling ER 114

XYZ
X-ray NT 137-138, NT 234-235
yachts PE 113
yoga ER 90
yurt PE 114
zoos LW 129-132
zorilla LW 112